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Solomon Schechter and the Ambivalence of Jewish Wissenschaft

DAVID J. FINE

SOLOMON SCHECHTER WAS THE LEADING JEWISH SCHOLAR of his day. Born in 1850 in the small Rumanian town of Focsani, Schechter studied rabbinics in Vienna and Berlin with the central figures of the *Wissenschaft* movement in Jewish scholarship. His teachers included Isaac Hirsch Weiss and Meir Ish Shalom (Friedmann) in Vienna, and Moritz Steinschneider in Berlin.¹ Finding himself very uncomfortable in Germany due to the prevailing anti-Semitism of its scholarly world, Schechter immigrated to England. There, in 1890, he became the resident scholar in rabbinics at the University of Cambridge. His numerous publications, popular and technical, his discovery of the Cairo Genizah in 1896, and his appointment to the presidency of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in 1902 all testify to his scholarly preeminence. Schechter's biography illustrates the drama of modern Jewry from its beginnings in small village life, through a bittersweet education in Germany, to settlement in the New World.²

Though he was one of the most influential he was also one of the most enigmatic figures in turn-of-the-century Jewry. His greatest legacy was the formation of an institution where Jewish scholarship would flourish in the context of a rabbinic seminary. Yet this double focus engaged him in the ambiguities and contradictions of modern life. The German-educated Cambridge professor once confessed that "the old Adam still asserts itself in me,"³ the Adam of a young boy growing up among Habad Hasidim in Rumania. While Schechter embraced *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the new academic study of Judaism, he furiously opposed the "higher criticism" of the Bible. He struggled against both anti-Jewish bias in the secular academic world, and the Reform movement in the Jewish world, which accepted many of the non-Jewish accusations against traditional Judaism. And the task of defending Jewish tradition along with his traditional loyalties prevented him from fully endorsing the critical inquiry central to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

1. Rabbinic Scholar and Polemicist

Isaac Hirsch Weiss and Meir Friedmann, Schechter's primary teachers in Vienna, were pioneers in the creation of critical editions of rabbinic texts.

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Applying the discipline of philology, they turned the study of Judaism into an academic “science.” A text now demanded comparison to extant manuscripts and different versions; context was determined by literary and historical background which explained why the text was written, by whom, and what role was played by its society and history; meaning resulted from comparative linguistic analysis. This program of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* set forth by Leopold Zunz and his associates in the early nineteenth century defined the work of Weiss and Freidmann and much of Schechter’s scholarship, which were devoted chiefly to the establishment of the correct reading of classic texts.

Schechter’s scholarly writings emphasized philologic analysis to determine the correct readings of texts, while much of his popular English writing was a polemic against the higher criticism of the Bible. “Lower” and “higher” criticism, terms used by Christian biblical scholars, with “lower” referring to the determination of the correct readings and meanings, and “higher” referring to the establishment of context and authorship, were the divisions of this scholarly practice. The “lower” criticism was the fundamental work upon which the theories of “higher” criticism were built. The adjective “higher” also hints at the belief in the conclusiveness of historical analysis. That Schechter’s popular writings were a polemic against the conclusions of higher biblical criticism is most evident in his two most famous books, the first volume of the *Studies in Judaism*, and *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, both consisting of previously published articles in the English *Jewish Quarterly Review* around the turn of the century.⁴

Most religious Jews had difficulty in accepting the higher criticism of the Bible which in the late nineteenth century produced the Documentary Hypothesis of Pentateuchal origins. The Five Books of Moses, it was proposed, were not a unitary document, but a collection of several different writings divided into the strands J, E, P, and D according to philological analysis of sources, and only brought together in its present form perhaps an entire millennium after the traditional reckoning. This theory was not openly accepted by the community of Jewish studies until the latter half of the twentieth century.⁵ In Schechter’s day the theory was generally rejected even by those who, like Schechter, were steeped in the philological study of rabbinic texts. But rather than defend the Mosaic authenticity of the Pentateuch, Schechter devoted his popular English writings to a defense of rabbinic Judaism, which was most threatened by the “higher critics.” Julius Wellhausen, in his 1878 treatise on the Documentary Hypothesis, explained how the priestly and later rabbinic concept of the “law thrusts itself in everywhere; it commands and blocks up the access to heaven; it regulates and sets limits to the understanding of the divine working on earth. As far as it can, it takes the soul out of religion and spoils morality.”⁶

While there is nothing new in this judgment against rabbinic Judaism, which was often articulated by Christian polemicists, its restatement by Wellhausen was particularly painful for traditional Jews like Schechter who

had been trained as scientific philologists. Wellhausen's views coincided with the decline of tolerance among the educated and the increasing influence of racist doctrines. The word "anti-Semitism" was created by Wilhelm Marr in 1879 in an attempt to give racialism an "element of the pseudoscientific," as Peter Pulzer explains, "the up-to-date, the apparently objective, and the dialectical in this six penny version of Darwin."⁷ Heinrich von Treitschke and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, both respected academics, added historical arguments to the "problem of the Jews."⁸ The 1870s and 1880s had shown a surprising resurgence of anti-Semitism in Germany which was not condemned by the government or the educated classes. The anti-Jewish feeling carried into general academic discourse. As Ismar Schorsch describes, "Generally Protestant scholarship portrayed Rabbinic Judaism in terms of the unbearable yoke of the Law, the transcendence of God, the abandonment of prophetic religion, national particularism, and soulless piety."⁹ The "transcendence of God" was seen as a negative characteristic in the latter half of the nineteenth century when the immanence of God in Christianity (through Jesus) was seen as superior to the perceived coldness of God's transcendence in Judaism.¹⁰ For them Christian love was preferable to Jewish law.

Wellhausen's negative appraisal of religious law was echoed by the Reform movement which had accepted much of his critique. Emil G. Hirsch, a leading American Reform rabbi at the turn of the century, writes concerning the influence of higher criticism on Reform Judaism: "The Pentateuch is not the work of one period. . . . The original content of Judaism does not consist in the law and its institutions, but in the ethical monotheism of the prophets. Legalism is foreign to Judaism."¹¹ Traditional Jews more committed to the legal aspects of the Pentateuch than their Reform counterparts were troubled by Wellhausen's conclusions. His views of Pentateuchal legalism were central to his understanding of the composition of the Pentateuch. While the early J and E sources provided the world with its loftiest ideals, he claimed, the late D source and even later P source imposed an oppressive cultic legalism upon the Pentateuch and the religion of Israel. The conclusion of this thesis, as read by Jews and Christians alike, was that after the constant struggles of the prophets this cultic legalism was finally overcome by Jesus, who restored the original purity which had been lost. Thus Wellhausen not only attacked Judaism but the Torah itself. His theories, which challenged the foundations of Judaism, claiming it was an aberration, had the authority of science. The scientific force of this religious message was very powerful, convincing both Jews and Christians. The response of Reform Jews was to develop a strategy of rejecting the redemptive role of Jesus while seeking to restore true prophetic idealism.

Schechter, a traditionally observant Jew and a distinguished scholar, was profoundly agitated by Wellhausen's conclusions. His writings testify to his need to show that Wellhausen was wrong. For Schechter, the Law is not stifling but the highest form of religion. "The motive of love," argued Schechter, "the privilege of bearing witness to God's relationship to the world, the attainment

of holiness in which the Law educated Israel, as well as . . . the joy felt by the Rabbis in the performance of the Law and the harmony which the Rabbis perceived in the life lived according to the Torah, were the true sources of Israel's enthusiasm for the law."¹² "Whatever meaning the words of the Apostle may have, when he speaks of the curse of the Law," writes Schechter, referring just as much to his Christian contemporaries as to Paul, "it is certain that those who lived and died for it considered it as a blessing. To them it was the effluence of God's mercy and love."¹³ In an even more obviously polemical passage, Schechter writes:

On the one side, we hear the opinions of so many learned professors, proclaiming *ex cathedra*, that the Law was a most terrible burden, and the life under it the most unbearable slavery, deadening body and soul. On the other side we have the testimony of a literature extending over about twenty-five centuries, and including all sorts and conditions of men, scholars, poets, mystics, lawyers, casuists, schoolmen, tradesmen, workmen, women [*sic*], simpletons, who all, from the author of the 119th Psalm to the last pre-Mendelssohnian writer—with a small exception which does not even deserve the name of a vanishing minority—give unanimous evidence in favour of this Law, and of the bliss and happiness of living and dying under it,—and this, testimony of people who were actually living under the Law, not merely theorising upon it, and who experienced it in all its difficulties and inconveniences.¹⁴

Schechter tries throughout his writings to explain that Jewish law is the fundamental redeeming aspect of classical Judaism, almost parallel to the role of Jesus for Christianity. Observance of the law establishes divine immanence, not distance. Anyone who knows anything about Judaism, argues Schechter, can see that this is true.

2. Biblical Critic and Defender of the Faith

Solomon Schechter was committed to *Wissenschaft*. He did not oppose the methods of higher criticism only its conclusions. This is evident in three of his studies (one a published address from 1899, one an unpublished manuscript in four parts from 1900, and one a published sermon from 1903), which will reveal Schechter's very ambivalent attitude towards biblical criticism. While always supporting scholarly inquiry, Schechter sought to check what he saw as "excesses" in higher criticism.

In "The Study of the Bible," the third essay of the second volume of the *Studies in Judaism*, Schechter articulates his approach towards biblical scholarship better than anywhere else. He delivered the paper as his Inaugural Lecture as Professor of Hebrew at Jews' College of the University of London on January 26, 1899,¹⁵ and delivered a revised version of the same essay before the American Bible Conference on December 7, 1904.¹⁶ In the paper Schechter divides the biblical critics into two schools, an "old school" and a "new school." Both schools are "critical." The "new school" is Wellhausen and his followers who understand the law only as "priestly fetich," while the "old school" more

seriously considers the problem of the “compatibility of a real living faith with a hearty devotion to ceremonial law.”¹⁷ The “old school” consists of “Ewald, Bleek, Dillman, Strack, Kittel, and many other men of prominence, none of whom could be suspected of being blind followers of tradition. They all accepted the heterogeneous composition of the Pentateuch, and cheerfully took part in the difficult task of its proper analysis.”¹⁸ Higher criticism itself was not objectionable. Schechter could respect scholars who treated Judaism with respect, even if they held to the Documentary Hypothesis. His difficulty was not with higher criticism itself as much as with the conclusions of the members of its “new school.” Schechter would not align himself with either school,¹⁹ but by focusing on the academic qualifications of the “old school” he seems to imply that as a professor he will appeal to scholarly research rather than dogmatic faith.

Even if he at times respected it, Schechter refused to teach biblical criticism himself. Announcing that he will focus his lectures on the Hebrew language and the content of the Bible rather than critical theory, Schechter writes:

I shall be more helpful to the student by lecturing *on* the Bible than by lecturing *about* the Bible. For the great fact remains that the best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. . . . I think every student will agree that the best exposition of the “Priestly Code” is to be found in Ezekiel, that the most lucid interpretation of Isaiah is to be sought in certain portions of the Psalms, and that, if we were to look for an illustration of the ideals of the Book of Deuteronomy, we could do no better than study the Books of Chronicles and certain groups of the Psalms. To use a quaint old expression applied to Scripture: “Turn it and turn it over again, for the All is therein,” both its criticism and its history. Introductions to the Old Testament, Lives and Times of the various prophets, and histories of the Canon, are excellent things in their own way; but unless we are prepared to exchange the older blind faith for the newer parrot-like repetitions of obscure critical terms, they should not be read, and, indeed, cannot be read with profit, before we have made ourselves masters of the twenty-four books of the Old Testament in the original.²⁰

From Schechter’s perspective, the study of biblical criticism should be postponed until one has already mastered the Hebrew Bible, as did Schechter himself.²¹ The average student is not qualified to study biblical criticism because he does not know the Bible well enough to judge the criticism. Biblical scholarship is only useful insofar as it explains the text. But Schechter believed that the text was being sidestepped in favor of grandiose theories on the development of Jewish religion. Now Schechter surely knew that Wellhausen knew the Bible in its entirety quite well. His concern, here voiced as the concern of a teacher, was that people were accepting Wellhausen’s conclusions without testing them against the Bible itself.

The “new school” of biblical criticism itself championed a methodology which ripped apart the integrity of the text. Schechter, who saw the Bible as a

literary whole, was enraged by the critics who, in his mind, sought to reedit the Bible since they could not understand the meaning of the original editors. Schechter wanted his students to let the Bible speak for itself first before they “tore it apart.” They should learn Hebrew before they argue with the authors and editors of the Bible. Since Schechter believed that so much of biblical criticism was wrong, to read criticism without a thorough knowledge of the Bible would give one the wrong impression of the Bible.²² The “older blind faith” is preferable to its newer replacements.

One can understand why Schechter might insist upon a thorough knowledge of the original literature in the original language before criticism is applied. Not only is that a sound educational method, but it describes Schechter’s own education. Schechter was born in a small village in Rumania and studied rabbinics in the traditional *yeshiva* (talmudical academy) until his twenty-fourth year, when he moved to Vienna to study at the Bet Midrash of Meir Friedmann, Isaac Hirsch Weiss, and Adolph Jellinek, who trained him in the critical study of rabbinic texts.²³ From Vienna Schechter went to Berlin to study at the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, where he continued his training in textual criticism with Israel Lewy. Berlin also offered Schechter the opportunity of studying with Moritz Steinschneider. Thus, Schechter only immersed himself in *Wissenschaft des Judentums* after years of study of the texts themselves in their traditional settings. For Schechter criticism is valuable only once one understands the subject.

Schechter’s reluctance to teach biblical criticism did not mean that he denied all of its tenets (although he certainly denied the Documentary Hypothesis). “That tradition cannot be maintained in all its statements need not be denied,” he says. “The Second Isaiah, for instance, is a fact; not less a fact is it that Solomon cannot be held responsible for the skepticism of the Book of Ecclesiastes, nor can David claim authorship of the whole of the Psalms for himself. The question at present, however, is not . . . whether tradition was not possibly mistaken in this or that respect, but whether it contains elements of truth at all.”²⁴ While the value of tradition may not have been the question in the minds of Schechter’s students in a Bible class, it was the question Schechter wished to address. Schechter was willing to admit that certain traditions of biblical authorship were incorrect. The book of Isaiah is not by one author named Isaiah, Solomon did not write the book of Ecclesiastes, and David did not write all the Psalms. But just because there are some mistakes in tradition does not mean that tradition is useless. Here Schechter’s posture of defending rabbinic Judaism becomes, curiously, a priority of biblical study. One notices as well that Schechter’s examples of the tradition’s errors in biblical authorship are all from the non-Pentateuchal sections of the Bible. He maintains his faith in the unified Mosaic Pentateuch.

“I am in no way opposed to criticism,” Schechter emphasizes. “Criticism is nothing more than the expression of conscience on the part of the student, and we can as little dispense with it in literature as with common

honesty in our dealings with our fellow-men.” Having argued for the importance of studying Hebrew and the Bible, Schechter seems here to be more open to critical inquiry. Is Schechter implying that even a beginning reader of the Bible should not put aside his critical conscience? “Nor, I trust,” he continues, “have I ever given way to anybody in my respect for most of the leaders of the various schools of Bible criticism, Lower as well as Higher. The attempt at an analysis of the Bible into its component elements, whether one agrees with its results or assumes a skeptical attitude towards them, is one of the finest intellectual feats of this century.”²⁵ This amazing appreciation of biblical criticism immediately turns sour: “Though a good deal of brutal vivisection is daily done by restless spirits whose sole ambition is to outdo their masters. . . . [I]f tradition is not infallible, neither are any of its critics.”²⁶ Schechter’s point is that while he has nothing against critical thinking, and while he respects the biblical critics, they commit gross errors, and it would be wise for the student to avoid too much of such studies. Indeed, the evidence is sparse and their theories are mostly conjecture.²⁷

While Schechter was a traditionalist in opposing the Documentary Hypothesis, an opinion which is somewhat muted in the 1899 paper but very clear in the later two writings, he was no dogmatist. He respected biblical criticism enough to read it seriously. As noted above, he drew a distinction between two schools of biblical criticism. The “new school” consisted of Wellhausen and others whom Schechter barely respected.²⁸ But there was the “old school” which he did respect, even though it consisted of men who all accepted the heterogeneous composition of the Pentateuch (i.e., the Documentary Hypothesis).²⁹

The passage quoted from “The Study of the Bible” and other passages from Schechter’s writings show that he had great respect for Kuenen, Dillman, Ewald, and others who were all leading figures in biblical criticism.³⁰ What he appreciated in such men was their respect for Israelite tradition and their sound philological methods. Schechter himself denied Davidic authorship for all the Psalms and argued along with Heinrich Graetz and other Jewish scholars for the Maccabean authorship of several Psalms, a very late dating. The discovery of the Hebrew Ben Sira text in the Genizah, however, provided evidence that Hebrew verse in the third century B.C.E. was already too evolved from biblical Hebrew to support the hypothesis of Maccabean Psalms, that is, biblical verse from the second century B.C.E. Schechter had to abandon the theory of Maccabean Psalms, “an hypothesis,” he writes, “on which I built great hopes. This is a great disappointment to me.”³¹ He and Graetz had argued for Maccabean Psalms partly because they hoped such a hypothesis would provide evidence for a vibrant Hebrew culture continuing through Hellenistic times.³²

Schechter accepted the notion that Pentateuchal law underwent extensive development. “The dietary laws,” he writes in a different paper, “forming part of the holiness code, and probably kept only by the priests, now [in the

time of Ben Sira] helped to hallow every Jewish home which came under the influence of the Synagogue.”³³ While not challenging the Mosaic authorship of Leviticus, Schechter proposes that the law code was not followed to its full extent by the people until much later times. The dietary laws might have only been observed by the priests through the entire First Temple period. Only by the time of Ben Sira did the observance of *kashrut* become widespread. As Schechter himself maintained, he was by no means opposed to criticism.

In July of 1900 Schechter wrote four studies attempting to disprove the late dating of Deuteronomy and Leviticus. On July 10 he wrote “On Ruth IV” which deals with the Deuteronomic levirate laws as well as Ruth, and “The Case of the Egyptian who Blasphemed the Name, Leviticus XXIV: 10–23.” On July 12 he wrote “The Date of the Land Laws in Leviticus XXV,” and on July 17, “On Deuteronomy XVII: 14–20 (The King).” All four studies were handwritten and apparently never prepared for publication, but preserved in manuscript among Schechter’s papers.³⁴ They provide a rare example of Schechter’s own approach to biblical criticism and elaborate views outlined to some extent in “The Study of the Bible.”

1. “*On Ruth IV*” begins with a quotation from S. R. Driver’s commentary to Deuteronomy 25:10, where Driver maintains that the marriage of Ruth and Boaz is not a levirate marriage because Boaz is not Ruth’s brother-in-law, as Deuteronomy would require.³⁵ “This passage is a fair representation,” Schechter begins, “of the view which would naturally be taken of the chapter in Ruth by a scholar who had no special legal training.”³⁶ But Schechter then goes on to show how obvious it is that Ruth 4 is dealing with a levirate marriage. “If it were true that this was a mere ordinary marriage, how could the name of the dead be raised up [as is made clear by verse 5]!”³⁷ Thus, in Schechter’s acerbic remark against Driver he is saying: (1) only scholars specifically trained in Jewish law should engage in biblical criticism, and (2) even a non-legal scholar should be able to see the obvious, which Driver does not. Driver could not understand the marriage of Ruth and Boaz as a levirate marriage according to the Torah since he believed that Deuteronomy was written later than the Book of Ruth.

Taking account of the differences between the Deuteronomic law and the narrative in Ruth, Schechter suggests that the account of the marriage of Boaz and Ruth in Ruth 4 represents “an extension of the Deuteronomic law [of levirate marriage].”³⁸ The differences between Deuteronomy and Ruth are summarized by Schechter:

- (1) The Deuteronomic ceremony was full of meaning to those on whom it was enjoined, whereas the actions of Boaz and the next of kin are a mere piece of legal formality necessary to a valid conveyance of the rights but having no contemporary significance.

- (2) The spitting—if the silence of the author of Ruth on such a point may be trusted—is omitted.
- (3) The woman no longer takes a part in the ceremony. Her presence is no longer necessary. He himself takes off his shoe.³⁹

Schechter's argument is that by the time of Ruth the law had evolved so that the levir's acquisition of the deceased's wife and property could be performed by any number of next-of-kin, not solely brothers. In addition, the shame associated with the levir's refusal had all but vanished. As Schechter explains: "The spitting was abandoned and the ceremony itself was only retained in a modified form and without any connotation of contempt owing to the extraordinary weight which ancient laws always attach to the performance of the prescribed legal acts long after those acts have ceased to have any meaning."⁴⁰

At this point Schechter seems extremely liberal in his analysis, acknowledging evolution of law even within the Bible itself. He also is able to refer to statutes of the Torah as "ancient laws," thus placing them in the context of general legal-historical studies. They are "ancient laws," not "laws commanded to Moses on Sinai."

"But one point [i]s to be noticed," Schechter continues, "if, even in the days of Ruth the ceremony had ceased to mean anything to the people, *a fortiori* it must have been unintelligible at the date to which the higher critics assign Deuteronomy."⁴¹ The narrative in Ruth describes the remnant of an ancient law which is preserved in its earlier fuller form in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy must be the original law, Schechter argues, since there the ceremony seems to have real meaning whereas in Ruth it is mere formality. Ruth represents the later development of this particular Deuteronomic legislation. How then can Deuteronomy be dated so far after Ruth? Rather, Deuteronomy must date from the ancient period of the inception of Israelite law, i.e., from the period of Moses.

As for the date of Ruth, Schechter suggests that "the book was written before the recovery of Deuteronomy in the reign of Josiah."⁴² Besides the evolution of the legal ceremony to mere formality discussed above, the author of Ruth would not have known of the Deuteronomic passage itself at all since the Book of Deuteronomy had, before King Josiah, been lost. The claim made by many scholars that the discovery of Josiah might have represented the composition of part of Deuteronomy rather than its mere recovery is not even discussed here by Schechter since he had already, at least in his mind, proved the Mosaic date for Deuteronomy by the analysis of legal evolution. Deuteronomy had to be written far earlier than Ruth since the legal ceremony needed time to develop. But Schechter admits that his proposal for the date of Ruth as before Josiah is "a slight presumption—I do not think it can be put higher than that."⁴³ The point he cared about was the early dating of Deuteronomy.

2. In “*The Case of the Egyptian who Blasphemed the Name*,” *Leviticus XXIV: 10–23*, an Egyptian who blasphemes the name of God is sentenced to death. This passage is placed in *Leviticus* amidst a series of laws against murder and assault, including the famous *lex talionis*. Schechter quotes from *The Hexateuch*, a commentary edited by J. Estlin Carpenter and G. Harford-Battersby in the same year as Schechter’s manuscript, 1900, which attributes the passage to the various different strands of P later to be edited into the final P source of the Pentateuch. The theory of different original authors, argue the higher critics, explains why the story of the blaspheming Egyptian should appear with other laws of no connection. The text we have is a composite. The story of the blaspheming Egyptian is from a different source than the assault laws, only later to be edited together.⁴⁴ After criticizing this argument, Schechter remarks that it is “a lamentable example of the hopeless incompetence of the critics and their methods to deal with the task they have been so ill advised as to undertake.”⁴⁵

Schechter’s critique of the higher critics on this passage is that if the passage is incomprehensible, to argue that it is a composite does not solve the problem. If the text were a composite, then it should be easier to understand, given the many layers of editing the text must have passed through. “If the Tora[h] itself does not date from the time of Moses,” Schechter argues, “how came anybody to insert this passage, and that at this place? . . . And it must be remembered that the critics allege that this part of the Tora[h] had been edited many times before reaching its final form—each time by men who never scrupled to add, excise or alter. How comes it then that such an obsolete and incomprehensible piece of antiquarian law was left in its place?”⁴⁶ The purpose of a commentary is to explain the text. If critical studies of philology and legal evolution help with that purpose, as Schechter did employ them, then that is acceptable. But if criticism only serves to make the text more incomprehensible, then it is useless.

If Schechter’s biblical studies have any significance besides their illumination of Schechter’s thinking, they can be seen as an early forerunner of contemporary biblical scholarship’s critique of nineteenth-century scholarship. “The first several waves of modern biblical criticism,” writes Robert Alter, “beginning in the nineteenth century, were from one point of view a sustained assault on the supposedly unitary character of the Bible, an attempt to break it up into as many pieces as possible, then to link those pieces to their original life contexts.”⁴⁷ Schechter argued, along with contemporary biblical critics (or redaction critics as they are sometimes called), that the text has its own context. Whether or not the text originated as a unified document or several documents, it was edited into a final document which has logic and order. Difficulties in the text cannot be explained away as simply due to compositeness.

“That I am not overstating the matter,” Schechter adds in his study of *Leviticus 24:10–23*, “is proved by the fact that the old Jewish commentators who had a practical knowledge of the Hebrew law cannot make head or tail of

the passage—to say nothing of the critics, than whom nobody could be more incompetent to deal with matters legal.”⁴⁸ Even the traditional Jewish commentators, whose explicative ability Schechter respected far more than the higher critics’, could not explain the context of this passage.

Schechter proceeds to solve the problem himself. The passage in Leviticus refers to a case which would have happened at the very beginning of Israelite occupation of the land, that is, at the time of the Conquest. Since there were many non-Israelites in the land, the question naturally arose as to whether they would be judged by Israelite law or not. When William the Conqueror invaded England, Schechter recounts, there was one law for the Normans and one for the Saxons. Not so with Israel, where all were judged by the same law, Israelite and non-Israelite. The Egyptian who blasphemed God was treated as if he were an Israelite blaspheming God. The issue at stake was not only God’s honor, but the effectiveness of the legal code. The laws of murder and assault are included in this same section since they would also apply during the period of the Conquest when the land was not yet pacified. The context of the passage is the establishment of the legal system at the beginning of Israelite power. The passage must then date from the time of Moses and Joshua, not a later time as the higher critics suggest. The higher critics could not see this since they were committed to the late authorship of Leviticus. The Jewish commentators could not see the context either since they did not analyze the Bible according to the principles of legal-historical evolution. Only Schechter, who respected the unity of the text and was able to apply to it legal and historical analysis, could see that the case of the blaspheming Egyptian and the murder and assault laws would all belong to a very early stage of Israelite legal development. Again, Schechter has used legal-historical analysis against the higher critics.

3. In “*The Date of the Land Laws in Leviticus XXV*,” Schechter argues against the view of the higher critics⁴⁹ that the sabbatical and jubilee year legislation must be of very late dating, and of a utopian character. Schechter’s basic argument is that the legislation only makes sense if it dates from the time of Moses. Any later hopes to institute such laws would have been ridiculous. Only at the beginning of Israel’s legal development could such legislation be sensibly introduced. As Schechter writes: “No mere author of politics and religious codes such as the higher critics presumably picture[d] . . . could have had the fanatical hopes of bringing about such a revolutionary scheme.”⁵⁰ Schechter’s arguments in this paper seem less compelling than the previous two. He does not adequately address the idea of “utopian” legislation (the program of Leviticus need not have ever been intended as a real political option) or, for example, the possibility of substantial economic reform in the time of Nehemiah. But he uses the same basic mode of argumentation as before: the use of legal-historical analysis to find a plausible historical context. There is, of course, a specific historical context he desires here: a Mosaic dating for Leviticus.

In the course of the Land Laws paper, Schechter does say something very revealing: “We must therefore conclude that in form as in matter we are dealing with the work of Moses. Of course, this is said without prejudice to the discussion of what exactly may be the correct readings in any of these passages under consideration.”⁵¹

Perhaps Schechter is only saying that there are different ways of interpreting the laws here. More likely, he is implying that while the higher critical studies of this passage which attempt to give it a late dating are misguided and incorrect, the lower critical studies which attempt to establish its authentic wording are still worthy endeavors. Just as Schechter accepted the fact of legal evolution in the Ruth paper, so here he accepts the possibility of textual corruption.

4. “*On Deuteronomy XVII: 14-20 (The King)*,” the final Bible study of the four manuscripts, is in many respects the most interesting. Schechter begins by quoting Driver’s commentary, which argues that the Deuteronomic provisions are to ensure that the monarchy be bound to ethical and theocratic principles.⁵² Driver also articulates the theory, which Schechter does not quote directly, that the Deuteronomic laws were composed after the reign of David and of Solomon since many of the Deuteronomic prohibitions were violated during their rule, and 1 and 2 Samuel seem unaware of these regulations.⁵³ Schechter criticizes Driver’s inability to explain Deuteronomy 17:15, which insists that the Israelite king not be a foreigner. After accepting four conclusions from Driver, Schechter proceeds to offer his own original interpretation. He first summarizes Driver’s conclusions on 17:15:

- (1) That the prohibition is remarkable.
- (2) That it won’t suit the known facts of history of either kingdom [i.e., Judah or Israel].
- (3) That it may have been due to some incident in the history of a neighboring country.
- (4) That the motive of the provision is probably religious.⁵⁴

Given these points Schechter goes on to suggest (remarkably) that the prohibitions in Deuteronomy 17 are in response, not to David and Solomon as the higher critics propose, but to the Pharaoh Horenheb. Providing us with a brief account of the reign of Akhnaton and that pharaoh’s monotheistic religion of Atonism, the worship of the sun, Schechter suggests “how Moses must have sympathized with such a religion when contrasting it with the others he knew.”⁵⁵ Moses must have then detested Horenheb, the conquering pharaoh who banished Atonism from Egypt and restored the old polytheistic cult.⁵⁶ Having suggested this, Schechter goes on to show how almost all the prohibitions against the monarchy in Deuteronomy 17 refer to aspects of Horenheb’s reign. He was a foreigner, a general, married for political gain, and

was not succeeded by children (the Deuteronomic punishment for the king who does not obey its prohibitions). Moses must have known Horenheb since the Exodus is dated less than a lifetime after his reign. "The facts appear to me to speak for themselves," Schechter concludes his paper. "It is to be noted that they furnish at least as convincing an argument for the date of Deuteronomy as are many that find favor with the critics."⁵⁷

In July of 1900 Schechter set out to disprove the higher critics and argue on the basis of critical historical investigation that the Pentateuch dates from the time of Moses. He wanted to prove "the genuineness of the book,"⁵⁸ that is, its historical authenticity. He was willing to accept legal development and historical influences on Moses' composition, but not that Moses did not compose the law himself. Schechter's strong commitment to Mosaic authorship was not only due to his piety, but to his desire to defend traditional Judaism against the implicit attack of Wellhausen's theory. While the early J and E sources provided the world with its loftiest ideals, argued the Wellhausen theory, the late D source and even later P source imposed an oppressive cultic legalism upon the Pentateuch and the religion of Israel. But for Schechter, traditional Judaism did not need Jesus, nor Reform "ethical monotheism," for its salvation. For Schechter, the Law itself was the source of salvation. P and D were God's gift of love.⁵⁹ Schechter wanted to prove that the P and D material were of Mosaic authorship because that material was the bedrock of rabbinic Judaism. That is why two of the studies argue for Mosaic authorship of Leviticus, the other two of Deuteronomy.

Schechter wrote these four studies in a single week, probably as a reaction to his reading *The Hexateuch*, also published in 1900. That two-volume study was prepared by a committee of Oxford scholars including Claude G. Montefiore,⁶⁰ who had been Schechter's pupil in rabbinics. The publication of the volume, which summarized most of the higher critical theories, and Montefiore's involvement in the project, must have angered Schechter who surely felt the need for a proper Jewish and scholarly response. These four essays could be the germ of that unfulfilled project. Or they might be merely Schechter's personal glosses. He never published them, but he did keep them with his papers. Perhaps he hoped to return to them one day and complete his work. Or perhaps he recognized that it was ill-advised to use the methods of biblical criticism to fight its widely held conclusions. Perhaps it was safer to avoid biblical criticism altogether, which he did accomplish in the curriculum of the Jewish Theological Seminary, refusing to hire a professor who would teach the higher criticism of the Bible.⁶¹

Another reason Schechter never published his Bible studies must have been his unease with their approach. In these studies, Schechter contextualizes biblical laws into the history of the development of Israelite law without any reference to the divine. This perspective of Pentateuchal legislation is radically different from the traditional view of the Torah as the revelation of God's will at Mount Sinai. Schechter's method was very different from that of Joseph H.

Hertz. Although Harvey Meirovich finds a strong influence of Schechter on Hertz and his commentary,⁶² their approaches were different. Nowhere in the four studies discussed above does Schechter mention God or any type of divine hand in the composition of the Bible. On the contrary, he argues for historical and legal evolution and claims that historical influences determine the composition of biblical texts. Hertz will, when no other explanation remains, rely on “the Providential view of human history.”⁶³ Schechter discounts the traditional Jewish commentators just as he discounts the higher critics,⁶⁴ while Hertz seeks to present the medieval Jewish commentators as eternally relevant. While Hertz sought to use scholarly argumentation, especially archeological evidence, to dispute the Documentary hypothesis, he was ultimately not as committed to critical investigation as was Schechter. Schechter did not merely use critical methods, he was a critic himself. While he denied the validity of the Documentary hypothesis, he still approached the problem as a scholar, and could only argue against the critics in their own language, the language of historical criticism. Perhaps that is why he never proceeded with his project to write a commentary, leaving it to others like Hertz.

Schechter’s most famous argument against higher criticism is an address delivered on March 26, 1903, entitled, “Higher Criticism—Higher Anti-Semitism.”⁶⁵ Its fame derives solely from its title, as there are many other places where Schechter’s critique of higher criticism and Protestant scholarship in general is more fierce.⁶⁶ But in that address he shares a very personal observation: “I remember when I used to come home from the *Cheder*, bleeding and crying from the wounds inflicted upon me by the Christian boys . . . the pain was only physical, but my real suffering began later in life, when I emigrated from Roumania to the so-called civilized countries and found there what I might call the Higher anti-Semitism, which burns the soul though it leaves the body unhurt.”⁶⁷

Schechter’s immigration to Central Europe exposed him to two phenomena which determined the course of his life: (1) *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, and (2) anti-Jewish bias in scholarship. The two were of course connected. The academic approach to Jewish literature was adapted by Jews partly in order to dispel misinterpretations of Judaism among the educated. Schechter became a part of that world. He sought to fight higher anti-Semitism with higher scholarship, challenging the academic community to accept his readings of the Bible and rabbinic sources, readings which were, of course, more favorable to Judaism. If his scholarship was polemical, so be it, Protestant scholarship was polemical as well.

This defensive posture of Schechter’s studies is reflected in an essay originally published in the *Westminster Review* in 1885, which Schechter wrote on rabbinic research: “But be our opinions of the Rabbis what they may, we may fairly claim, in the name of scientific justice, as well as that of Christian charity, that he who proposes to pass judgment upon them shall first hear their case, and understand it; in other words, that he shall read the Talmud, and

critically examine it, before he begins to write about it and to expound it.”⁶⁸ Schechter held this maxim for biblical studies as well. One must understand the Bible in its own context before discussing who wrote it and when. Schechter believed that such responsible scholarship would help dispel the anti-Jewish prejudices of Protestant intellectuals.⁶⁹

3. The Shadow of Zunz and the “Old Adam”

Gerson D. Cohen claimed that “the man of the nineteenth century whom Schechter knew least but venerated most was Leopold Zunz.”⁷⁰ Zunz was Schechter’s hero. He was completely absorbed into German culture, produced monumental works in Jewish scholarship, and opposed Reform within the Jewish community. Among various other references in his writings,⁷¹ Zunz is given a central place in Schechter’s introduction to the first volume of the *Studies in Judaism*, which is one of the few places where Schechter attempts to articulate his own theology.⁷² In fact, Schechter wrote a lengthy study of Zunz in 1889, which won first prize in an essay contest of the Jewish Ministers Association of America, but he never published it. The editors of the third volume of the *Studies in Judaism* published it posthumously. One page is missing in the manuscript,⁷³ and apparently contains the conclusion of a discussion on Zunz’s theology and how it was meaningful to Schechter. But there is enough in the surrounding pages to inform us of Schechter’s meaning. One passage from the paper will summarize its main theme. After noting that in Zunz’s time “the Talmud and the Midrashim were considered as a perversion of the Pentateuch and the books of the Prophets, and the Jewish liturgy a bad paraphrase of the Psalms,” Schechter writes:

To destroy these false notions, to bridge over this seemingly wide and deep gap, to restore the missing links between the Bible and tradition, to prove the continuity and development of Jewish thought through history, to show their religious depth and their moral and ennobling influence, to teach us how our own age with all its altered notions might nevertheless be a stage in the continuous development of Jewish ideals and might make these older thoughts a part of its own progress—this was the great task to which Zunz devoted his life.⁷⁴

Gerson Cohen, in his lecture on Schechter, suggested one emendation: in the last phrase, substitute “Schechter” for “Zunz.” Zunz was Schechter’s model of the modern Jewish scholar.⁷⁵

What Schechter understood as Zunz’s theology, as deduced from his scholarship, became his own theology as developed in the introduction to the *Studies in Judaism*. In that essay Schechter articulates the theology of the “Historical School” by noting that “the center of authority is actually removed from the Bible and placed in some *living body*” . . . the “collective conscience of Catholic Israel as embodied in the Universal Synagogue.”⁷⁶ This language was first used by Schechter in his analysis of Zunz in 1889, where he speaks of “the synagogue as a living body.”⁷⁷ He learned from Zunz that Judaism was a

tradition which develops through time. Authority for Jewish tradition lies not in its origins of revelation but in the people's acceptance of the traditions through history. Schechter was not completely comfortable with this position. At times, he confesses, "the old Adam still asserts itself in me, and in unguarded moments makes me rebel against this new rival of revelation in the shape of history."⁷⁸ But since that is the "old" Adam in "unguarded" moments, we know that Schechter remained committed to the historical perspective.

The primacy of tradition and the national consciousness of the Jewish people which Schechter learned from Zunz are made manifest in Schechter's Zionism. When he declared himself a Zionist in 1906,⁷⁹ he aligned himself with the cultural Zionism of Ahad HaAm.⁸⁰ For both, Zionism was a force against anti-Semitism and directed towards the "awakening of the national Jewish consciousness."⁸¹ The national Jewish consciousness was what he and Zunz had been searching for in their researches of the literature of "the Synagogue" or "Catholic Israel," which was the "universal consciousness" of the nation. Schechter's Judaism was a national culture, not a faith alone.

There are two unpublished writings where Schechter makes his appreciation of Zunz clear. One, "Abraham Geiger," was published posthumously in the third volume of the *Studies in Judaism*.⁸² (This was never published by Schechter during his lifetime, probably because of its fierce anti-Reform polemic.)⁸³ In the essay he compares Geiger to Zunz, who "never apologized for the existence of Israel,"⁸⁴ but supported Israel's separateness, opposing Geiger on the abolition of circumcision.⁸⁵ "That history means remembrance," wrote Schechter, "and that remembrance results in hope, which is the very reverse of absorption, was not foreseen by the few historians the Reform Movement gave us. This could only have been divined by men like Krochmal and Zunz, who were ahead of their time; whilst Geiger was strictly a product of his time."⁸⁶ The other unpublished essay which is even fiercer in its anti-Reform polemic and extant only in manuscript is a review of David Philipson's *The Reform Movement in Judaism*. In that essay Zunz again serves as the exemplar of tradition and scholarship in the battle against Reform.⁸⁷

One might ask why, if Zunz was so important to Schechter, he never published his 1889 essay on Zunz's work and thought. The logical place for it to have been published would have been the first volume of the *Studies in Judaism*, which was a collection of Schechter's best essays through 1896. One possible explanation is that while the Reformers believed the two movements in Judaism in the nineteenth century to be Reform and Rabbinism, Schechter saw three, which he defines in his unpublished review of Philipson:

- (1) The Mystical movement, which appealed to the emotions, and was inaugurated by R. Israel Baal Shem and continued by the leaders of the Chassidim.
- (2) The "Wissenschaft" movement, which appealed to the philological and historical conscience of men, begun by the Gaon of

Wilna and developed by Krochmal, Rappaport, Zunz, and their successors.

- (3) The Rationalistic movement, which appealed to the instincts of imitation and assimilation initiated at least by Herz Homberg and Peter Beer, continued under Israel Jacobson, David Friedlaender, and their successors.⁸⁸

Schechter included Reform under “Rationalistic,” and sees it as opposed to *Wissenschaft*, which is not concerned with assimilation but with Jewish national culture.⁸⁹ Although this scheme is quoted here from a late writing in Schechter’s life, it seems to have been in his mind in 1896 when he put together the first volume of the *Studies in Judaism*. The first three essays treat the Hasidim, Krochmal, and the Vilna Gaon, respectively. The Vilna Gaon represents the eighteenth-century predecessor of the *Wissenschaft* movement since he approached rabbinic texts with a critical eye. Krochmal represents its development in the nineteenth century. The “Rationalistic” movement is omitted. The representations of the other two are all from eastern Europe, as was Schechter himself. As a student in Germany, Schechter surely felt the antipathy towards eastern European Jewry. Thus, in the face of those attitudes of German Jewry, he presented the *Wissenschaft* movement as well as the Hasidic movement as hailing from eastern Europe. Only rationalism and Reform came from the West.

There is another aspect as well. Schechter could not bring his study to publication, since he recognized the paradox inherent in his feelings. After all, how could he love Zunz, when Zunz himself was a higher critic of the Bible? Certainly Schechter was aware that Zunz published an article in the *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* in 1873, and then published an expanded form in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, entitled “Bibelkritisches.”⁹⁰ In that study Zunz concluded that Leviticus was written one thousand years after Moses, and that clear evidence for the existence of the Pentateuch begins no earlier than three hundred years after King Josiah.⁹¹ Schechter was never able to accept higher criticism as a legitimate Jewish pursuit.

Zunz concluded his study with two fascinating sentences: “Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur and Purim, unknown to more ancient Judaism, owe their existence to foreign influences and a later era. Meanwhile, history and the development of the human spirit have given them a significance beyond their source. So long as poets and priests [i.e., the biblical authors] continue to exert influence, historians and philosophers must not tire of researching the origins.”⁹²

For Zunz, the authority of Jewish traditions does not derive from a Mosaic Torah but from the acceptance of the traditions by the Jews through history. While Schechter agreed with this pure *wissenschaftliche* approach in principle, he only articulates it once in his 1896 introduction to the *Studies in Judaism*. The academician and the old Adam struggled within him. It was

probably because he could never decide whether there should be limits to *Wissenschaft* that Schechter never published the biblical studies of 1900 nor the Zunz essay of 1889.

The ambivalence which Schechter felt towards the Historical School which he expressed in the 1896 introduction to the *Studies in Judaism* was determinative. While he was committed to research and agreed in principle with all the methods of critical scholarship, he could not publicly endorse biblical criticism, and, therefore, was unable to prepare his Zunz essay for publication. He had to oppose higher criticism since it was riddled with anti-Jewish bias. Far more than Zunz, Schechter was intimately connected with the Jewish world of his time.⁹³ Zunz abhorred what he called the *Glaubenswissenschaft* (dogmatic history) of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau.⁹⁴ He came to hate the use of scholarship as a religious polemic. While Zunz rejected a call to become a rabbi in New York because he feared his scholarship would suffer,⁹⁵ Schechter left his professorship at Cambridge University to become President of New York's Jewish Theological Seminary of America. And for Schechter, to doubt the Mosaic authenticity of the Torah went beyond the pale of responsible and traditional rabbinic scholarship.

NOTES

1. For laudatory letters from Weiss, Friedmann and Adolph Jellinek, see *Jewish Theological Seminary of America Students' Annual*, Schechter Memorial (1916), pp. 13–16. Steinschneider's letter of reference is included in *Application and Testimonials for the Post of Reader in Talmud in the University of Cambridge by Solomon Schechter* (1890), located in the Schechter Collection, Special Collections in the Rare Book Room, Jewish Theological Seminary of America Library (henceforth "Schechter Archives"), 101: 13. This paper owes its existence to the encouragement and instruction of my teacher, Professor Ismar Schorsch. I have also benefited from conversations with Professors Edward L. Greenstein, Jeffrey Gurock, Jack Wertheimer, Neil Gillman, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, and my father, Rabbi Robert E. Fine. I am grateful to the staff of the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, especially of its Rare Book Room, for its help.

2. There is no critical biography of Schechter which seeks to understand him in the context of his times. The full-length biography by Norman Bentwich, *Solomon Schechter: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1940), is useful but too laudatory to fulfill this lacuna. The short book by Azriel Eizenberg, *Fill a Blank Page: A Biography of Solomon Schechter* (New York: United Synagogue, 1965), is intended for young people, but it is a well-researched anthology of wonderful anecdotes. The documentation of his research has been deposited in the Schechter Archives, 101:

14. The only serious treatment I have found on Schechter and his context is a videotaped lecture by Gerson D. Cohen at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America entitled "Solomon Schechter: Transmitter of Rabbinic Tradition," delivered 2 November 1986. The videotape is cataloged in the Jewish Theological Seminary Library.

3. Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, First Series (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1896), p. xx.

4. The first series of the *JQR* was the English publication used for learned Jewish apologetics as well as scholarly research.

5. Mordecai Kaplan complained in 1934 that "although most of the modern Jewish scholars tacitly assume that [modern scientific] attitude toward the Bible, not one of them has made any attempt to face the issue squarely." From Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a*

Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life (1934; reprint, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981), p. 549, n. 6.

6. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 509. On Wellhausen and Judaism, see Jon D. Levinson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), pp. 10–15; S. David Sperling, ed., *Students of the Covenant: A History of Jewish Biblical Scholarship in North America* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), p. 38 (from ch. 2 contributed by Baruch A. Levine); Lou H. Silberman, “Wellhausen and Judaism,” *Semeia* 25 (1982): 75–82.

7. Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria*, rev. ed. (London: Peter Halban, 1988), p. 48. On Marr see Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 331–333.

8. See Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, *Jew in the Modern World*, pp. 343–346, 356–359.

9. Ismar Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 170. See the treatment on pp. 169 ff., which places Schechter into this context (p. 171).

10. Rudolf Otto’s *Idea of the Holy*, first published in Germany in 1917, went against the grain in stressing (or reaffirming) the transcendent element in Christian religiosity.

11. Emil G. Hirsch, *Reform Judaism from the Point of View of the Reform Jew, the Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 10 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1905), p. 350. See also Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 202–203.

12. Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (1909; reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 169.

13. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, pp. 146–147.

14. Solomon Schechter, “The Law and Recent Criticism,” in *Studies in Judaism*, First Series, pp. 243–244.

15. Solomon Schechter, “The Study of the Bible” in *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1908), p. 309. The essay appears on pp. 31–54.

16. Schechter Archives, 101: 8.

17. *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, pp. 32–34. “Fetich” was English spelling.

18. *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, p. 33.

19. *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, p. 34.

20. *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, pp. 36–37. For a parallel passage, see *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers* (1915; reprint, New York: Burning Bush Press, 1959), p. 56.

21. “It is said that when he [Schechter] was only 5, when a visitor came to the house, he would throw himself face downwards on the couch and recite the entire portion of the week” (three or four biblical chapters). From Charlotte Schechter, “Solomon Schechter: Rumanian Notes,” an unpublished manuscript dated 9 July 1935. Schechter Archives, 101: 13.

22. See *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, p. 38.

23. See the account in Bentwich, *Solomon Schechter*, pp. 35 ff. Schechter received his rabbinic ordination from Isaac Hirsch Weiss and Meir Friedmann in 1879. I find it telling that, although Schechter was for years an outstanding student in the Rumanian yeshivot, he was ordained by critical rabbinic scholars.

24. *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, p. 39.

25. *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, p. 40.

26. *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, pp. 40–41.

27. *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, pp. 41–42.

28. For anti-Wellhausen remarks in Schechter’s writings, see *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, pp. 42, 106; *Seminary Addresses*, pp. 4, 5, 38, 70, 173.

29. See *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, p. 33.
30. See *Studies in Judaism*, First Series, p. 240; *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, pp. 33, 40, 42, 106, 200; *Seminary Addresses*, pp. 4, 5, 36. I have found one anti-Kuenen remark (*Seminary Addresses*, p. 70), but that is contrasted with at least seven positive remarks.
31. *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, p. 46.
32. This insight was explained to me by Ismar Schorsch. This is misunderstood by Baila Round Shargel in her *Practical Dreamer: Israel Friedlaender and the Shaping of American Judaism* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1985), pp. 199–200, who assumes that Schechter wanted to disprove the late dating of the Psalms in his Ben Sira studies to oppose an element of the Wellhausen hypothesis. But Schechter wanted the Psalms to be late, contra tradition!
33. *Studies in Judaism*, Second Series, p. 70.
34. They are located in the Schechter Archives, 10: 7.
35. S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), p. 285. Deuteronomy 25:5–10 is the source of the laws of levirate marriage where if a man dies childless his wife must be wed to his brother. The first child born of that union is to be raised by the brother as the child of the deceased. However, if the brother does not want to marry the widow then he must appear before the elders of the town where the widow pulls the sandal off his foot, spits in his face and makes a declaration denouncing him, but also, in effect, releasing him from his duty to marry her. This is known as the ceremony of *halitzah*.
36. Schechter, “On Ruth IV,” p. 2. Page numbers for the four Bible studies from Schechter Archives 101: 7 all refer to manuscript pages.
37. Schechter, “On Ruth IV,” p. 3.
38. Schechter, “On Ruth IV,” p. 8.
39. Schechter, “On Ruth IV,” pp. 8–9.
40. Schechter, “On Ruth IV,” pp. 9–10.
41. Schechter, “On Ruth IV,” p. 10.
42. Schechter, “On Ruth IV,” pp. 15–16. The Bible recounts (2 Kings 22) that a forgotten “scroll of the Teaching of the Lord” was discovered in the Temple in the reign of King Josiah. Since the subsequent religious reforms of Josiah reflect the Book of Deuteronomy, many scholars believe that scroll to be Deuteronomy, or at least a significant portion of it.
43. Schechter, “On Ruth IV,” p. 15.
44. J. Estlin Carpenter and G. Harford-Battersby, *The Hexateuch*, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1900), p. 176.
45. Schechter, “The Case of the Egyptian who Blasphemed the Name, Leviticus XXIV: 10–23,” p. 8.
46. Schechter, “The Case of the Egyptian,” pp. 13–14, 15.
47. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 16.
48. Schechter, “The Case of the Egyptian,” p. 14. For a parallel argument, see Jack R. Miles, *God, A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).
49. He refers specifically to the commentary in *The Hexateuch*, op. cit.
50. Schechter, “The Date of the Land Laws in Leviticus XXV,” pp. 3–4.
51. Schechter, “The Date of the Land Laws,” p. 9.
52. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 210.
53. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 212–213.
54. Schechter, “On Deuteronomy XVII: 14–20 (The King),” pp. 3–4.
55. Schechter, “On Deuteronomy XVII: 14–20,” pp. 10–11.

56. This study of Schechter was written 37 years before Freud's theories in *Moses and Monotheism* were first published. In that book Freud sees Moses as an Egyptian who sought to establish among the Israelites the monotheism of Akhnaton which had been suppressed in Egypt by the "new pharaoh."
57. Schechter, "On Deuteronomy XVII: 14–20," p. 16.
58. Schechter, "The Case of the Egyptian," p. 16.
59. The second benediction before the reading of the *Sh'ma* in the daily Jewish liturgy praises God's love for Israel in granting the statutes and laws. The majority of Pentateuchal legal material is found in the P and D sections.
60. See *The Hexateuch*, vol. 1, p. v.
61. Israel Friedlaender, whom Schechter appointed as the Seminary's biblicist, was a medievalist with little expertise in biblical criticism (see Shargel, *Practical Dreamer*, esp. ch. 3). Although Louis Ginzberg did accept the Documentary Hypothesis (see his article, "The Codification of Jewish Law," in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, reprinted in Louis Ginzberg, *On Jewish Law and Lore* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955], pp. 153–158), he was not appointed to teach Bible.
62. See Harvey Meirovich, "Reclaiming Chief Rabbi Hertz as a Conservative Jew," *Conservative Judaism* 46 (Summer 1994), esp. pp. 4–5; Harvey Meirovich, *Judaism on Trial: An Analysis of the Hertz Pentateuch* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1986), pp. 1–3, 86 ff., and elsewhere.
63. J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 2d ed. (London: Soncino, 1972), p. 555.
64. Schechter knew how to be critical of the Rabbis. He wrote in the *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*: "The fact is that the Rabbis were a simple, naive people, filled with a childlike scriptural faith, neither wanting nor bearing much analysis and interpretation" (p. 42).
65. *Seminary Addresses*, pp. 35–39.
66. For anti-higher criticism remarks, see *Studies in Judaism*, First Series, p. 154; *Seminary Addresses*, pp. 16, 56–57, 69–70, 124, 131. For anti-Protestant scholarship see, for example, *Seminary Addresses*, pp. 173–174.
67. *Seminary Addresses*, p. 36. The *cheder* is the traditional Jewish primary school.
68. Reprinted in Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, Third Series (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1924), p. 193. For a much harsher statement of the same idea, see p. 4 of an unpublished, untitled, undated manuscript by Schechter on the higher criticism of the Talmud, in Schechter Archives, 101: 9.
69. See *Seminary Addresses*, p. 232.
70. Gerson D. Cohen, "Solomon Schechter," videotaped lecture at the Jewish Theological Seminary, 2 November 1986.
71. See, for example, *Seminary Addresses*, pp. 52, 74, 121, 173–193; *Studies in Judaism*, Third Series, p. 4.
72. *Studies in Judaism*, First Series, pp. xvi–xvii.
73. *Studies in Judaism*, Third Series, pp. 84–142. See p. vi. On this essay, see the *Jewish Chronicle*, January 3, 1890, p. 6; and Siegmund Maybaum, "Aus dem Leben von Leopold Zunz," *Zwölfter Bericht über die Lehrentstalt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin* (1893), p. 2, n. 2, who mentions Schechter's intention to publish the essay soon. I have searched for the missing page in the Schechter Archives, and have made inquiries to the New York Board of Rabbis (which was, I believe, the "Jewish Ministers Association" although that is unclear) and to the archives of the Hebrew Union College and the American Jewish Historical Society, but all to no avail. Jeffrey Gurock of Yeshiva University, who is an authority on American Jewish history at the turn of the century, has advised me that any document from the New York Board of Rabbis from those years will prove impossible to find.
74. *Studies in Judaism*, Third Series, p. 98.
75. See above, n. 70.

76. *Studies in Judaism*, First Series, p. xviii. See my forthcoming article, "The Meaning of Catholic Israel," and my brief comments on the subject in *Conservative Judaism* 47 (Spring 1995): 76–79.
77. *Studies in Judaism*, Third Series, p. 115. See also pp. 111, 114, for parallels with the passage from 1896 just cited.
78. *Studies in Judaism*, Third Series, pp. xx–xxi.
79. See "Zionism: A Statement," in *Seminary Addresses*, pp. 91–104. On Schechter's Zionism, see Robert E. Fierstien, "Solomon Schechter and the Zionist Movement," *Conservative Judaism* 29 (Spring 1975): 3–13; David Benjamin Starr, "We Cannot Escape History: Solomon Schechter and Zionism," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* 55 (1993): 65–82.
80. See *Seminary Addresses*, pp. 97, 101.
81. *Seminary Addresses*, pp. 99–100.
82. *Studies in Judaism*, Third Series, pp. 47–83.
83. See Felix Perles, review of *Studies in Judaism*, Third Series, by Solomon Schechter, *Revue des Etudes Juives* 80 (1925): 107, who criticizes the essay on this point.
84. *Studies in Judaism*, Third Series, p. 69.
85. See Leopold Zunz, "Gutachten über die Beschneidung," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1876), pp. 191–203.
86. *Studies in Judaism*, Third Series, pp. 71–72.
87. Schechter Archives, 101: 9. See pp. 12–14 of the manuscript. Briefly summarized in Bentwich, *Solomon Schechter*, pp. 304–305.
88. P. 4 of the manuscript.
89. See *Seminary Addresses*, p. 175, where Schechter distinguishes between Jewish *Wissenschaft* and the "Reform or Rationalistic movement."
90. Leopold Zunz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Berlin: L. Gerschel, 1875), pp. 217–270.
91. Zunz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, p. 242. See Meirovich, *Judaism on Trial*, p. 113, who points out this conclusion of Zunz contra Schechter and Hertz. But Baruch A. Levine, in Sperling, *Students of the Covenant*, criticizes Zunz for not accepting higher criticism! (p. 23)
92. Zunz, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, p. 242. My translation.
93. Schechter seems inspired by what he identifies as "Zunz's motto": "Echte Wissenschaft ist thatenerzeugend" (real scholarship creates action). See *Studies in Judaism*, Third Series, p. 117, and *Seminary Addresses*, pp. 20–21. He does not offer any citation from Zunz for the phrase.
94. Zunz to Gerson Wolf, 16 October 1854, in *Leopold Zunz: Jude–Deutscher–Europäer*, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1964), p. 364. See Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1994), p. 195.
95. Zunz to S. M. Ehrenberg, 11 December 1834, in Glatzer, *Leopold Zunz*, p. 175.

Ethnic Trait or Religious Value: Why We Jews Enjoy a Good Argument

J A C O B N E U S N E R

WHEN JEWS STUDY TORAH, THEY ARGUE. WHEN THEY SIT sedately in a class room and acquire information, they may study, but they are not studying Torah. Tractate Abot is explicit on two things: (1) a shy person cannot learn, and (2) an ignorant person cannot be authentically pious. Put the two together and you come away with the view that to learn, we must be aggressive. And we Jews, when it comes to learning, are surely that, which is why we produce so many great attorneys and physicians, physicists and sociologists, among the many learned professions and academic sciences in which Jews have excelled over time.

Now people maintain that the very quality of the Jews' ethnic character—one of our traits as a group with a shared culture and tradition—explains our proclivity for conducting an aggressive intellectual life. To our culture ideas count, what you think makes a difference to the other. And others hold that there is a Jewish personality, which thrives on conflict and contention. We are not afraid to differ, and we enjoy a good argument. It is our mode of relating to the other, with “yes, but . . .” our favorite sentence-starter.

But I want to argue otherwise. In my view the religion, Judaism, imparts certain qualities to the faithful, shapes personality in one way rather than in another. Both the Torah itself, and how the Torah is authentically studied, teach us to value argument and respect difference. That is because both the Torah and the Talmud—that is, the written and the oral parts of the Torah—lay great stress on the power of rationality, and it is the conviction that we share the same reasoning and therefore can persuade one another that forms the source of energy for our proclivity to argue. For before you can have an argument that makes any sense, you have to take for granted two facts: (1) you can persuade the other, or you won't bother to argue, you'll just try to force your will on the other; and (2) the basis for persuasion is reason, a shared mode of thought and analysis, which properly set forth to the other will show you are right and the other is wrong.

Take for example the greatest moment in the written Torah, Abraham's plea to God to spare Sodom, which I rehearse here in the fourth sedra of

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Genesis. Every year we go over the same story, because the story is meant as a paradigm, a pattern of human affairs, in the form of a narrative. Out of respect for Abraham, God informs him, “The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave, I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached me; if not I will take note” (Genesis 18:21).¹ Abraham steps forward and says to God, “Will you sweep away the innocent along with the guilty, What if there should be fifty innocent within the city; will you then wipe out the place and not forgive it for the sake of fifty innocent within the city? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to bring death upon the innocent as well as the guilty, so that innocent and guilty fare alike. Far be it from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” (Genesis 18:23–25). Now what is remarkable in this statement of Abraham’s is the premise: God is bound by the same rules of justice as apply to God’s creatures, and what is amazing is Abraham’s certainty that God can be persuaded, coerced by the power of reason. So we see that the Torah itself takes for granted that we may argue even with God, all the more so with everybody else, and the Torah here announces that rationality governs God as much as the rest of us.

I could find throughout the Torah case after case in which the Almighty God appeals to reason that is shared with humanity, and in which the prophet confronts God with a strong argument. By reason Moses saves Israel after the incident with the golden calf, by reason Aaron defends his conduct of the cult from God’s and Moses’s criticism, by reason Israel’s fate is governed—and because reason prevails, controversy and argument take their place as the principal medium for interaction, whether on earth or between earth and Heaven. From Abraham’s indignant argument, Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly? Jews have taken as established fact that we may confront God with a good argument—all the more so, our fellow human beings.

But these are not merely abstract theological convictions. Theological truths in the religion of the Torah make a difference when they take concrete form. So if we maintain as a matter of theology that reason links God to us, that rationality—what appears to us to be self-evidently true—governs both God and us, then how do we say so in a manner that is palpable and tangible and accessible to our imagination?

The following story—perhaps the single most famous passage of the entire Talmud—asks whether God can intervene in reasoned argument. No, the following story insists, He cannot. Once the Torah has come into the hands of our sages of blessed memory, God has had His say and has bound himself to the rules of reason and order that sages discern, and through this world and its order and regularity are able to report and record. So as a source of truth even miracles, deemed part of this world and its ways, take second place behind this world’s order: God is compelled by the same considerations of rationality and logic that govern human judgment. And even to God no shortcut is open. Reasoned persuasion is the only way forward.

The story itself involves Rabbis Eliezer and Joshua, the two greatest disciples of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, who, after 70 C.E. led the work of recording the principles of the oral Torah, work that a century or so later on would produce the Mishnah itself. The issue subject to debate need not detain us. It is the character of proof accepted in the debate that catches our attention. For, beyond all argument, Eliezer invokes a miracle—and Joshua rejects supernatural intervention. Once the Torah has been given to humanity, everyone—in Heaven and on earth—is bound by its dialectic rationality; miracles no longer need apply.

There we have learned: **If one cut [a clay oven] into parts and put sand between the parts,**

R. Eliezer declares [the oven broken-down and therefore useless and so] insusceptible to uncleanness.

And sages declare it [still subject to restoration and therefore useful and so] susceptible.

And this is what is meant by the oven of Akhnai [M. Kel. 5:10]. . . .

It has been taught on Tannaite authority:

On that day R. Eliezer produced all of the arguments in the world, but they did not accept them from him So he said to them, ‘If the law accords with my position, this carob tree will prove it.’

The carob was uprooted from its place by a hundred cubits—and some say, four hundred cubits

They said to him, “There is no proof from a carob tree.”

So he went and said to them, “If the law accords with my position, let the stream of water prove it.”

The stream of water reversed flow.

They said to him, “There is no proof from a stream of water.”

So he went and said to them, “If the law accords with my position, let the walls of the school house prove it.”

The walls of the school house tilted toward falling.

R. Joshua rebuked them, saying to them, “If disciples of sages are contending with one another in matters of law, what business do you have?”

They did not fall on account of the honor owing to R. Joshua, but they also did not straighten up on account of the honor owing to R. Eliezer, and to this day they are still tilted.

So he went and said to them, “If the law accords with my position, let the Heaven prove it!”

An echo came forth, saying, “What business have you with R. Eliezer, for the law accords with his position under all circumstances!”

R. Joshua stood up on his feet and said, “‘It is not in heaven’ (Dt 30:12).”

What is the sense of “‘It is not in heaven’ (Dt 30:12)?”

Said R. Jeremiah, “[The sense of Joshua’s statement is this:] For the Torah has already been given from Mount Sinai, so we do not pay attention to echoes, since you have already written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, ‘After the majority you are to incline’ (Ex 23:2).”

R. Nathan came upon Elijah and said to him, “What did the Holy One, blessed be he, do at that moment?”

He said to him, "He laughed and said, 'My children have overcome me, my children have overcome me!'"

Babylonian Talmud Baba Metzia 59 A-B

This story accords ample recognition to R. Eliezer's powers over nature; his prayers are readily answered; he controls the seas; Heaven does what he wishes to the carob tree, the stream, and the walls of the study-house, and the very crops in the fields respond to his will. In that context—perfect faith in supernatural powers accorded to holy men to do miracles—the priority of reason, as worked out here and now by sages, is self-evident. Miracles cannot in the end contradict the course of nature.

Before us is one of the most representative passages of the Talmud, the claim that we, human beings, may argue with God—and win! God is bound by the same logic that governs our minds, and we by that which governs God's. Through the ages, those concluding words have inspired the disciples of sages at their work: through intelligent argument the sage may overcome in argument the very Creator of heaven and earth, the One who gives the Torah—and is bound by its rules too. Here, in the Torah, humanity is not only like God but, in context, equal to God because subject to the same logic. In secular terms this view corresponds to the conception of theoretical mathematics as the actual description of nature.

It is one thing to allege that God is bound by the rules of reason. It is another to say, as the Torah does, that the way to God is through challenge and response, controversy and argument, dispute and disputation. The intrinsic value of a good argument comes to concrete expression in a story about two paramount debaters, paramount contenders, in the formation of Judaism in its formative age, named Yohanan and Simeon b. Laqish. To understand the story, you have to know that Simeon was a mugger and a thief, whom Yohanan drew to study of the Torah and turned into a great master and sage. (Note here that the Hebrew is in Roman type, the Aramaic in italics.)

One day there was a dispute in the school houses [on the following matter]: As to a sword, knife, dagger, spear, hand-saw, and scythe—at what point in making them do they become susceptible to become unclean? It is when the process of manufacturing them has been completed [at which point they are deemed useful and therefore susceptible]. And when is the process of manufacturing them completed?

R. Yohanan said, "When one has tempered them in the crucible."

R. Simeon b. Laqish said, "When one has furbished them in water."

[R. Yohanan] said to him, "Never con a con-man" [lit.: a robber is an expert at robbery].

He said to him, "So what good did you ever do for me? When I was a robber, people called me, 'my lord' [lit. rabbi], and now people call me 'my lord.'"

He said to him, "I'll tell you what good I've done for you, I brought you under the wings of the Presence of God."

R. Yohanan was offended, and R. Simeon b. Laqish fell ill.

R. Simeon b. Laqish died, and R. Yohanan was much distressed afterward. Rabbis said, "Who will go and restore his spirits? Let R. Eleazar b. Pedat go, because his traditions are well-honed."

He went and took a seat before him. At every statement that R. Yohanan made, he commented, "There is a Tannaite teaching that sustains your view."

He said to him, "Are you like the son of Laqisha? When I would state something, the son of Laqisha would raise questions against my position on twenty-four grounds, and I would find twenty-four solutions, and it naturally followed that the tradition was broadened, but you say to me merely, 'There is a Tannaite teaching that sustains your view.' Don't I know that what I say is sound?"

So he went on tearing his clothes and weeping, "Where are you, the son of Laqisha, where are you, the son of Laqisha," and he cried until his mind turned from him. Rabbis asked mercy for him, and he died.

Babylonian Talmud Baba Metzia 84A

Here is no idealization of ivory-tower scholars but a realization of the powers of dispute, rich in contention, conflicting ambition, anger, irascibility—none of the political virtues of compromise at all. There is heat as well as light, name-calling as well as reasoned debate. In the end, we see, however, that Yohanan cannot survive in a world in which people agree with everything he says. He dies. And so does a community which abandons the ambition to argue and gives up on the notion that contending ideas form the nourishment of the social order. And so, all alone, do all those who insist, without reasoned argument to sustain it, on their opinion. "Well, anyhow, that's my opinion" forms the sentence of death. Without argument and reason, holy Israel perishes. And it deserves to. The Talmud contributes the model of how the well-considered life is to be lived.

Before us is a deeply philosophical way of thinking—and of living. It is not for everybody, but it is for those who respect themselves and think that their minds make a difference, and these are profoundly ethnic-Jewish attitudes, as well as authentically religiously-Judaic convictions. What marks writing as philosophical in secular terms and authentic to the Torah in the Torah's terms is the claim that what is said confronts and withstands contrary opinion, enjoys the validation of argument and evidence, and enters into the competition of truth. The other—reader or listener—is invited to participate, indeed treated as judge of the process.

What changes us from a kingdom of priests and a holy people into a commonwealth of philosophers? The thinker becomes a philosopher in the setting of Classical philosophy, or a talmid—a disciple of the sages—in the setting of the Torah, when he or she acknowledges that one's own concept competes with some others. That takes place when one assumes the burden not only of announcing a view but examining evidence acknowledged by all sides, and conducting an argument of advocacy and analysis in accord with modes of argument shared by both (or all) parties. And, in the nature of things, the claim to present the best explanation, the most adequate theory, carries with it the

requirement that the claim register in public, in open debate and universally-accessible argument. To think is to act in intellectual community, and much philosophical writing—Classical and Talmudic alike—takes the form of an argument—a dispute, a debate, a dialogue.

The substance of debate and dispute corresponds to the form: just as ideas are exchanged and compared, so the exchange takes place face to face and not only in autonomous writing. Question-answer, not only set-piece, side-by-side expositions of two contrary propositions best embodies the transaction. Take for instance the two creation stories of Genesis, Genesis 1–2:4, and Genesis 2:4 to the end. Or the two stories of Noah and the ark, one with the animals going in two by two, the other in groups of seven. Now both stories in each instance cannot be right, but Scripture sets them forth without saying so. But the Mishnah and the Talmud in its wake are highly articulate in saying so. They do not ignore disharmony or cover over conflict; they go in search of contradiction and make the most of it. The Talmud is the Talmud because of its dialectical argument.

The Talmud has defined the character of *talmud Torah*—the central Jewish mode of learning and study—for the centuries from its closure not only because of its authority and position but also, and especially, because of its character as a piece of writing. For in the Gemara or Talmud we have a commentary in the form of arguments, with an on-going and unending exchange of viewpoints, reasons, evidence, contrary rules and contrary traditions, adduced in favor of a given reading of matters and against some other.

That is why the Talmud is not really a book you open, read to yourself, close, and refer to from time to time. Rather, the Talmud is an occasion for learning, words to be declaimed, embellished, elaborated, in conversation with your companion in study, who responds to your reading and articulation with his or her own. And with a rabbi as witness and critic you proceed into the Talmud as the starting point for a conversation on the urgent issues that the Mishnah has set forth and the Talmud has amplified. You sing to one another, and a mark of mastery of the text will be the power to replicate the appropriate melody for each stage in an argument. In the classical settings of learning, called yeshivas, these conversations tend to take place in a large common room and to create a cacophony. That captures what is in play in the act of *talmud Torah*: a great many individual intellects in collision, like atoms, producing enormous heat but also energy and light.

The source of energy—the ground for intellectual engagement—is the Talmud's mode of presenting the law, which is through dialectical arguments. These are arguments that are made up of exchanges of contrary viewpoints, that move from point to point, and that unfold in surprising ways. They are not just set-piece duplications of the arguments for this view or the arguments for that. Rather, arguments are taken up and analyzed, met and countered, and then new arguments may develop in due course—hence the adjective, “dialectic,” or moving. What is the point of staging long-ago disputes about issues that

may or may not make an impact upon the everyday world? It is to engage right thinking: the way to take up the Torah's teachings and make them concrete. And that is not through instruction by a teacher of a student but by personal engagement in the processes of reasoning.

That is why the Talmud's dialectical arguments are so framed as to expose the entire process of reasoning and analysis. And that is where we enter in. Because people set forth not only their opinion but also their argument, we are able to enter into the same discussion. With our own powers of rational analysis we can take up our side of the matter, suggest possibilities, propose alternatives, above all, raise objections. And the Talmud is so worded as to allow us to join in for yet another reason. What we have is not a full transcript but brief notes, which make it possible for us to reconstruct the arguments, the wording and the thought processes alike, that pertain. If we had a fully-spelled out wording of matters, the best we could do would be to repeat the argument from a script, perhaps adding our own emotions to make matters lively. But with brief notes (and a teacher to help us transform the notes into a reasoned and fully articulated exchange), we have to use our minds and imaginations to join in.

Now to see the Talmud in its correct context, I underscore the centrality of controversy. What makes the Mishnah what it is, and what gives energy to the Talmud, is the persistent articulation of arguments and disputes: you hold this view, I hold that view, and we cannot both be right. Let us then say what the issue is and argue it out. That emphasis upon articulating conflicting views and proposing through reasoned argument to choose the right one and reject the wrong one is what makes philosophers in the great Western tradition. It encompasses the achievements of Greece and the Mishnah and the Talmud, and we are their heirs and disciples. The great British Classicist and historian of science, G. E. R. Lloyd, shows us what is at stake:

The Egyptians . . . had various beliefs about the way the sky is held up. One idea was that it is supported on posts, another that it is held up by a god, a third that it rests on walls, a fourth that it is a cow or a goddess. . . . But a story-teller recounting anyone such myths need pay no attention to other beliefs about the sky, and he would hardly have been troubled by any inconsistency between them. Nor, one may assume, did he feel that his own account was in competition with any other in the sense that it might be more or less correct or have better or worse grounds for its support than some other belief.

When we turn to the early Greek philosophers, there is a fundamental difference. Many of them tackle the same problems and investigate the same natural phenomena [as Egyptian and other science], but it is tacitly assumed that the various theories and explanations they propose are directly competing with one another. The urge is towards finding the best explanation, the most adequate theory, and they are then forced to consider the grounds for their ideas, the evidence and arguments in their favor, as well as the weak points in their opponents' theories.²

At its deepest foundations, Rabbinic Judaism takes its place wholly within Greek philosophical modes of articulating contradictory propositions and proposing explicit arguments and evidence to show that one is right, the other wrong. In general people understand that these principles of thought form the foundations of Western knowledge. But we now see that the Israelite heritage—the written Torah—from the very outset was perceived through the intellectual prism of that philosophy.

Our sages of blessed memory in the Mishnah and the Talmud undertook their generative and formative thought wholly within, completely at home in, the Greek philosophical milieu, so far as that intellectual world required the explicit articulation of dispute and validation through rigorous argument of one position over the other, contradictory one. When in the synagogue we study Torah through the medium of the Talmud, we turn into the occasion of sanctification, not only illumination, what in the academy people do when they study the debates in Plato's *Dialogues*.

Within the framework of Greek philosophy the Judaic sages learned those lessons concerning the logic that forbade holding contradictory propositions and compelled sound, analytical argument to validate or disprove a fiercely-defended position. And, I cannot stress too much, it was at the very beginnings, the point at which the Mishnah and Talmud were taking shape, that the intellectual revolution represented by the appropriation of Greek philosophy and science took place for the heirs of Israelite Scripture. They carried out a labor not only of thinking in ways for which Scripture did not prepare them, but of substantiating their views in dialectical argument and analytical demonstration formerly inconceivable. The new age of reason required finding a language and aesthetics for expressing the distinctive modes of thought and argument that now concerned them—a new way of setting forth the results of a new way of thinking without precedent in the Israelite heritage. That is what is at stake in *talmud Torah*—in Jewish study—turning an ethnic group into a holy people, a mixed multitude into a happy commonwealth of philosophers—perpetually arguing in quest of reasoned truth.

NOTES

1. *The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text: A New Translation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955).
2. G. E. R. Lloyd, *Early Greek Science: Thales to Aristotle* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1970), pp. 11–12.

Party Life

In memory of Isaac Rothenfeld/Jack Ross (1904-1944)

All their names were different now.

In cramped, airless meeting rooms in Union Square,
in garden apartments in Queens and bungalows in the Catskills,
they lopped off extra syllables like sidelocks
making names less redolent of ritual oil and *shtetl* cooking,
with one swift stroke converting Old World to New.

After long days in service to the garment industry
they gathered at night over books and glasses of tea,
studying Marx as diligently and faithfully
as their forefathers had once studied the ancient rabbis,
hoping it would reveal to them an order,
a complex and beautiful structure to the world,
where once they had seen only chaos.

The youthful rage they felt inside them
politics turned to a more specific force,
like a magnifying glass changing sunlight to fire.
Now they could forget for a moment the ache in the neck,
the marbly knots developing in the shoulders,
as they envisioned the paradise they would one day build,
brick by brick, with their own hands.

I think now of my grandfather and his friends
buried in a crowded, treeless cemetery far from the city
the IWO their *landsmanshaft*,
on streets named after Akiba, Bialik, Carmel, Daniel
they await together the End of Days,
the future trapped forever in the past.

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פארטיי-לעבן

צום אנדענק פֿון יצחק ראָטענפֿעלד/דזשעק ראָס (1904-1944)

די אַלע נעמען זינען איצט אַנדערש געוואָרן.
אין קליינע, אַנלופֿטיקע צימערן לעבן יוניאַן-סקווער,
אין קווינסער גאָרטן-דירות און בנדלעך אין די קעטסקיל-בערג,
האַבן זיי פֿון זיך אָפּגעשוירן איבעריקע טראַפֿן ווי פּאות
מאַכן זיך נעמען וואָס שמעקן ניט מיט קיין ריטואַל-ייל און שטעטלשע קיכן.
מיט איין געשווינדן קלאַפּ שמדן זיי אָפּ אַלטע וועלט אויף נייער.

נאָך לאַנגע טעג בני די מאַשינען אין פֿאַבריק
קומען זיי זיך צונויף מיט ביכער, איבער גלעזער טיי
זיי שטודירן מאַרקס מיט אמונה-שלמה, וואָס בני רבנים,
זוכן אַן אַנטפלעקנדיקע פֿאַרעם,
אַ קאָמפּליצירטע און שיינע אַרדענונג
וון פֿריער איז געווען בלויז תּוהו-ו־בּוהו.

דעם יוגנטלעכן צאָרן קאַנצענטירן זיי אין דער פּאַליטיק,
ווי אַ לופּע וואָס בײַט זונענשנין אויף פֿניר.
איצט קענען זיי פֿאַרגעסען, אויף אַ מאַמענט, דעם ווייטיק אינעם נאָקן,
די ביקלעך וואָס וואַקסן אָן אויף די פלייצעס,
בעת זיי חלומען וועגן דעם גן-עדן וואָס זיי וועלן אַ מאָל בויען,
ציגל נאָך ציגל, מיט די אייגענע הענט.

איך דערמאָן זיך איצט אין מנין זיידן און זינע חברים,
וואָס זיי ליגן אין אַן ענגן, אַנבוימיקן בית-עולם ווייט פֿון שטאָט,
דער אינטערנאַציאָנאַלער אַרבעטער-אַרדן זייער לאַנדסמאַנשאַפֿט,
אויף גאַסן וואָס זינען נעמען נאָך אַקבאַן, ביאליקן, פּרמל, דניאלן,
זיי וואַרטן צוזאַמען אויפֿן סוף פֿון די טעג,
די קומענדיקע שוין אַנגעוויירן אויף אייביק אין די פֿאַרגאַנגענע.

Bearing Witness: Morality and Religion in the Thought of Yeshayahu Leibowitz

H A I M M A R A N T Z

AT THE TIME OF HIS DEATH A LITTLE MORE THAN TWO years ago Yeshayahu Leibowitz held the position of Visiting Professor in the Department of Philosophy in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Prior to that he was head of the Biological Chemistry Department at the Hebrew University and Professor of Neurophysiology at the Hebrew University Medical School. He was born in Riga in 1903 and educated in Germany and Switzerland before he made Aliyah in 1934. In the last few years of his life, his fame spread beyond Israel and even Jewish circles, in recognition of his religious and moral presence. Isaiah Berlin, who knew him when both were young boys in Riga, wrote of him: "I have followed with admiration the views and actions of Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and what makes such a profound impression on me is the unshakable moral and political stand which he took for so many years in the face of so much pressure from those well-meaning persons who urged him to be sensible, realistic, not to let down the side, not to give comfort to the enemy, not to fight against current conventional wisdom. But he did resist these pressures and did not lower his flag." Of him, "I believe it can be said more truly than of anyone else, that he is the conscience of Israel. Yeshayahu Leibowitz is surely one of Israel's greatest moral assets. . . . Fortunate the society which still has such men to speak for it." These words of Berlin are printed on the cover of a book of Leibowitz essays, which were translated into English by Eliezer Goldman and published as *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*.¹

Berlin did not exaggerate. Few people who read Leibowitz will not feel humbled and nourished by their contact with the thoughts of this truly great man even when they disagree with them. I shall quote freely from this volume for I want to try to convey not just some thoughts of Leibowitz, but also, if possible, something of the character of the man himself.

I begin by saying something about Leibowitz's conception of Zionism, for this is something most Jews and most Israelis did not, and still do not, understand. Leibowitz's conception of Zionism was an extremely modest and unambitious one. He claimed that "it is not an ideology, but a complex of activities undertaken to restore independence to the Jewish nation in its own land." It is as he poignantly put it "an expression of our being fed up with being ruled by the *Goyim*." He was therefore able to say, and he said it to the end of his life, that he

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was “one who hasn’t been at all disappointed by the state of Israel,” for it has achieved all that he had hoped for it. How is this possible you may ask. How could a person who was such a severe critic of much Israeli policy, especially someone who was so evidently pained by the injustices committed by Israel against the Palestinians, say that he was not disappointed by the state of Israel. The answer lies in his minimal conception of the state. The state he claimed was “essentially secular,” and in the specific case of the state of Israel it “should be an arena in which the struggle for Judaism takes place . . . a struggle between the value of the world of Torah and the Mitzvot and the value of the declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.”² He personally was disappointed by the outcome of that struggle, but he did not blame the state for it.

The main features of Leibowitz’s contribution to the debate over what should be the relationship between the state of Israel and the Jewish religion are these. First he argues that religious Jews should become clear about the character of their religiosity. He summarizes his views in the following way: “Judaism is a particular way of serving God and not any particular conception of man, of the world, or of history. . . . Judaism is a system of halakhic praxis, a program fixing detailed arrangements of the every day, and the effort to carry out this program is what constitutes faith. Love of God is but the observance of the Mitzvot. Their justification is not national, and not moral and not social. Had the rationale of the mitzvot been national welfare, fulfilling them would express love of Israel. Had it been moral, their observance would indicate the love of mankind. Had it been social, observing them would serve important human needs.”³

Secondly, he claimed that historically only Judaism as constituted by halakhic praxis has determined Jewish identity and despite the fact that many, perhaps most, Jews today wish to be Jews without Judaism, Leibowitz believed that no plausible and honest account of how that is possible would be forthcoming. Thirdly, he was persistently concerned both to expose and to warn against the tendency to *avodah zarah*, to idolatry, amongst both his religious and non-religious fellow citizens.

Ever since the beginning of the Zionist movement there has been a debate over the place of religion in the constitution of Jewish identity and the relationship between Judaism and the Jewish State. This debate within Israel has at times been so bitter that many have expressed the fear that it could lead to a civil war. Leibowitz was never really a participant in that debate. For him, all states, even the Jewish state of Israel, are “essentially secular.” This was not his struggle. His struggle was against many on either side in that debate. Thus most of the vociferous religious sects taking part in that debate are in his judgment, idolaters: They “have deified the nation, adopted patriotism as their faith and made the state their religion. Their concern is not with the Jewish people as (potentially or in actuality) the People of the Torah, but with the Torah as serving the interests of the nation and the state.”⁴

Moreover, he believed that many of those who are religious and who are not idolaters have so compromised their religion in their pursuit of power in

the Knesset and other corridors of power that they fell into the trap set for them by Ben Gurion who, Leibowitz claimed, once told him: "I will never agree to the separation of religion from the state. I want the state to hold religion in the palm of its hand."⁵ This is the basis for Leibowitz's claim that "the status of religion in Israel is that of a kept mistress of the secular government."⁶

For these and other reasons he notes that "The state of Israel does not radiate the light of Judaism to the nations, not even to the Jews."⁷ He also says, "I do not expect our state to be a light to all nations. It is not a light even to the people of Israel who walk in darkness."⁸ These remarks may sound similar, but for Leibowitz their difference is important. Leibowitz had no sympathy for the wish that Israel should be "a light to all the nations." He insists that "The idea that the people of Israel have been endowed with a capacity for instructing and girding all of humanity has no basis in authentic Jewish sources. . . . This idea was fabricated by the heretics—from the Apostle Paul to Ben Gurion—who meant to cast off the yoke of the Torah by substituting for it a faith in an abstract 'vocation.' The Jewish people were not given a mission, they were rather charged with a task—the task of being servants of God."⁹

What Leibowitz wanted for Israel may be inferred from the following; "Instead of inciting the Jewish youngster in the Diaspora to rebel against his parents, instead of arousing a critical attitude towards them and himself and enlivening the implicit though barely conscious conflict over their Jewish identity, we come to his parents appealing for funds which become a surrogate for genuine participation in the life of Israel. And so, instead of a movement of rebellion in the interest of a renewal of Jewish life, Zionism and with it the state of Israel have become a tranquilizer relieving Jews of personal engagement with the problems of Jewish existence."¹⁰

That is the main reason why he argued for the separation of religion from the state: not so that religion may be, as it mostly is in Western countries, a private affair, but so that Judaism may regain the integrity necessary for it to participate in the struggle for authentic Jewish identity—and so that it may have the deserved authority to pronounce on and to judge the affairs of state.

Leibowitz's preoccupation with the tendency of religion to decline into idolatry, and with the disposition to idolatry—as treating as being of absolute religious value what is only of relative human value—even amongst those who are not religious—is at the center of his religious, moral, and political thought. Throughout his writings he insisted that applying the religious category of holiness to social, national, and political values and interests was idolatry, and in conjunction with it usually entered the following plea: "Abrogation of the distinctive religious category of holiness and imputation of sanctity to human functions and drives is one of the most vicious phenomena of our times, socially, educationally and morally."¹¹

Leibowitz's stern criticism of the evils which he believed were the inevitable consequences of the Israeli occupation of the territories conquered in the Six Day War earned him bitter condemnation. The real character of the

conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is, he claimed, distorted by talk of competing rights, even by talk of the conflict between claims of equal justice.

In the consciousness of a people, the tie binding it to its country is unconditioned and not defensible on legal grounds. By the same token it is equally impossible to justify on such grounds. For the people in question it is part of their reality. As such it is far more living and poignant than any legal bond or "right." The country we live in was in ancient times the land of the people of Israel. Even when, in the wake of destruction and exile, the people were physically severed from their country the nation continued to exist with its national consciousness. Jews whose national consciousness is still alive consider this country the "Land of Israel" even without regard to claims of right. No counterclaim can deprive them of this feeling. It is the same for the Arab inhabitants.¹²

Leibowitz believed that only "one way out of this historically created impasse is feasible . . . even if neither side recognizes it as justified or finds it really acceptable: partition of the country between the two peoples."¹³ Leibowitz consistently claimed from the first day following the Six Day War till the day he died that Israel should unilaterally offer to withdraw from the occupied territories. This he claimed is a precondition for peace, but he was never under any illusion that it would immediately lead to a state of peace: peace, he said, is a "vision for the distant future." His main reason for calling for a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the territories was to end the corruption of Jewish life in Israel caused by the evils of occupation.

Jews both inside and outside of Israel often criticize non-Jews for what they (often rightly) judge to be their one-sided and hypocritical condemnation of Israel. Many of the same Jews say or imply that serious criticism of Israeli policies should be limited to Jewish circles. Then there are those Israeli Jews who claim that only Israelis have a right to criticize Israel. If this were to happen then Jews would speak of such matters to Jews, and Gentiles only to Gentiles, and in the extreme case Israeli Jews only with Israeli Jews. Perhaps we Israelis do not need discussion with non-Israeli Jews about Israeli affairs, but non-Israeli Jews and Gentiles need honest and forthright dialogue with us. If they do not get it, then they cannot fairly be criticized for lacking sobriety in their criticism of Israel, or with regard to the Gentiles for failing to understand the many dimensions of Jewish pain in the face of such criticism.

There has been Jewish pain in the face of such criticism, especially since the early 1970s when Western intellectuals ended their romance with Israel. It would, however, be a mistake to think that the deep sense among many Jews that serious criticism of Israel should remain amongst themselves is only an example of a familiar—if foolish and counterproductive—political tactic. It is sustained by a sense that in the final analysis we Jews are not answerable to the *goyim*. The gentile world has time and time again undermined its moral authority to hold the Jews, all the Jews, answerable for the crimes of the Jewish state. The centuries of persecution, the Holocaust, the resurgent anti-Semitism both in Europe and in other places, the crassly insensitive tendency

to say that it is time to put the Holocaust behind us, the double standard deployed in the judgment of Israel and other nations—all these, and more, reinforce the suspicion Jews have of gentiles. Yet it is quite clear that Israel, being a member of the community of nations, is answerable to that community. And that fact alone, notwithstanding all the comprehensible and legitimate reasons for Jewish resentment, would be sufficient to answer the question: What right do the *goyim* (and non-Israeli Jews) have to involve themselves in the affairs of the Jewish state?

That, I think, is clear enough, but it is by no means the end of the matter. One does not always have the right or authority to say what one believes to be true even to those whom one (rightly) considers most in need of hearing it. I assume that to be uncontroversial, but there are deep difficulties about the nature and scope of the right or authority to speak, and these are felt by all attentive readers of Leibowitz's writings.

Consider for example his discussion of Jewish identity. This is some of what he wrote: "The distinctiveness of the Jewish people as a historic national entity began to be blurred some 200 years ago. Until then a Jew who cast off the yoke of the Torah and Mitzvot usually recognized that he thereby loosened his ties with the Jewish people. The innovation of recent generations is the phenomenon of Jews—a great number of them and today the vast majority of those considered Jews—who have abandoned the Jewish way of life without severing themselves from their people. There is no authentic 'Jewish' content to their lives which might distinguish them from Gentiles. Nevertheless, they continue to regard themselves as Jews and to be regarded as such by others."¹⁴

Now it is clear to anyone who reads this, Jews and gentiles alike, that what Leibowitz says is far from definitive. Much could be said in response to it, much in the tone of protest—that the issue is not so simple, that considerations have been left out, that distinctions have failed to be acknowledged, or not acknowledged at all. And so on. That is surely fair. But the problem of what to make of such protest remains. Which distinctions are to be drawn? Which would clarify and which would obscure?

The answers to these questions depend on one's sense of what kind of discussion one is a part of. Treat what Leibowitz says as a sketchy scholarly account, universal in its address, and one response will be appropriate. Treat it as a call to sobriety and honesty by one Jew to his fellow Jews and another response will be appropriate. It is quite clear to me that Leibowitz thought that one should do the latter. Consider a remark I have heard Amos Oz make in response to the question "Who is a Jew?" He says, "Whoever wants to be a Jew is a Jew. Anyone in this day and age who is crazy enough to call himself a Jew is a Jew by definition." This is clearly silly, as silly as to say that one is a Jew if one feels like a Jew, or that one is a Jew because one likes *gefilte* fish. All these assertions deny that in claiming to be a Jew one is answerable to the kind of challenge put by Leibowitz: that one may need to explain, if only to oneself,

with what right one calls oneself a Jew, or to answer to the professed content of one's feelings for the thoughts and beliefs which give them character and identity and which determine whether they are shallow (even if intense) or deep. All this is obvious. But the fact that someone as intelligent and as informed as Amos Oz could say what he did shows that something is surely fundamentally wrong with the discussion of Jewish identity.

But both Jews and Gentiles take heed. Part of what needs to be taken into account when judging the seriousness of a discussion is that what counts changes over time. Today there can be no discussion of Jewish identity which ignores the effect of persecution and, of course, of the Holocaust. And there can be no discussion of Jewish persecution in general and of the Holocaust in particular without truthful and painful speaking about the corrupt and opportunistic ways in which these have been used in the service of more than one Jewish political cause. But to point that out is something only for a Jew to say. A gentile may think it but if he or she is sensitive he or she will realize that it is a discussion which they have no right or authority to take part in. This is a view in which I am sure Leibowitz would have concurred.

Leibowitz was not a consistent thinker, though always a provocative one. His view of ethics is troubling. Utilitarianism, for example, is an ethic; no one, not even Leibowitz would deny that, but utilitarianism does not regard man as "the supreme end and value." And there are other ethical theories which also do not. Leibowitz makes no mention of any of them. He says that there are only two forms of morality: "Morality as guidance of man's will in accordance with nature and of himself (the stoics, Spinoza), or [morality] in accordance with what the individual considers his duty towards man as an end-in-himself (Kant)."¹⁵ It is only the second, the Kantian conception which Leibowitz takes seriously. However he claims of it that it deifies man. Against the claim that human beings are ends in themselves, he says repeatedly that they have "no intrinsic significance."¹⁶ Why, then, does he not say that from a religious point of view only a religiously informed or religiously grounded ethic can express a conception of the absolute which is not counterfeit?

"Absolute" is a tricky term and one with which to make mischief. Leibowitz often uses it to refer to a standard by which to judge everything else. That is a legitimate use of the term, but it obscures rather than clarifies what is at issue in this discussion, for according to it a hedonist treats pleasure as of absolute value. But no one would on that account wish to say that hedonists possessed an absolute conception of value. So much I think is clear, but it is no easy matter to move forward. If, however, one wished to give examples of philosophers who expressed the latter sense of absolute value, then Plato and Kant would be clear contenders, whereas Bentham and Protagoras would not. I assume that it is for that reason that Kant is Leibowitz's favored idolater. But why does he not then say that the sense in which Kant's ethic expresses a conception of absolute value is a sense which requires religious underpinning? Or, more generally, that anything which is worthy of the label "absolute ethic"

depends on religious grounding? It is hard to answer on his behalf, but I think he would have claimed that ethics is inescapably connected with human needs, desires, and interests, whereas religion worthy of that name is not. I think what he was after was an ethic whose character was determined by religion, as distinct from a religious duty to obey an ethic whose character was determined independently of religion. That would be an ethic of an anthropocentric religion, that is, of a religion unworthy of the name.

In terms of values, I am familiar with two basic conceptions of man's essential nature. Both are legitimate, though they differ greatly from each other. One is the theocentric view embodied in the Judaism of the Torah, as expressed in the opening paragraph of the *Shul Khan Arakh*: "Gird up your strength like a lion to rise in the morning for the service of your creator." Not, mind you, to serve man, reform society, redeem humanity, but to serve God. This is the entire meaning of Judaism, of the Torah, and Mitzvot. It is not mere chance that the supreme symbol of faith in Judaism is the sacrifice of Isaac: "Take your son your favored one whom you love and offer him there as a burnt offering . . . so early next morning Abraham saddled his ass, and took the firestone and the knife and his son Isaac. And the two of them walked on together." Because of this deed alone it was said that Abraham was a God-fearing man: that is to say, he suspended all human values for the sake of the service of God. A second axiological conception is the anthropocentric one: the view of man as pivotal. In effect this is a view of man as God, and this is Kant's great idea—man as an end in himself. It is the ultimate logical consequence of atheism. Both conceptions are legitimate; the theocentric conception represented by the Judaism of the Torah, and the anthropocentric concept embodied in the highest form in the philosophy of Kant, and, less authentically, in Christianity. But there is a third conception, one that is vicious and despicable. In it man is judged from the standpoint of a deified collective, not in respect of his position before God, or of his intrinsic worth. This is the ethnocentric view which regards as central a particular human collective, a people or a race rather than God or man. The idea has generated much evil and has been the source of great calamities. I am afraid that those who honestly cling to their relationship to the historic chain of the Jewish people, who hope it will be continued and look upon themselves as a link in the chain even though they have become alienated from the theocentric core of Judaism, unwittingly assume this ethnocentric position.¹⁷

This passage has led some to think that Leibowitz's criticism of Israeli injustices in the territories divides between this religious criticism of Jews who have unwittingly (and sometimes wittingly) assumed the ethnocentric position, and his moral criticism of the injustices they have committed because of it, a moral criticism whose character and tone is uninformed by his religiosity. There are passages in his writings where Leibowitz comes close to saying something like this himself. However to the best of my knowledge he never says this precisely. It is important when reading the cited passage and others similar to it to pay attention to their tone, and if this is done what is clear is that Leibowitz is drawing attention to the tensions between morality and religion.

A religious duty to be moral cannot be an occasional duty nor can it also be a religious duty to violate morality. If that is true or if only the former is true, then the connection between morality and religion would be closer than Leibowitz allows. If the religious duty to be moral cannot be an occasional duty, then the suspicion arises that “cannot” marks a conceptual connection between religion “worthy of the name” and morality.

Leibowitz wrote time after time that from the theocentric religious point of view human beings have no “special significance.” He wrote that “if religion has a function it is to place man’s limited values in perspective.”¹⁸ One way in which we reveal our sense of the “significance” of human beings is in our understanding of what it means to wrong them—in our understanding of the very particular way that murder and torture, for example, are terrible.

Leibowitz argues that “From the standpoint of Judaism man as such has no intrinsic value. He is an image of God, and only as such does he possess special significance.”¹⁹ Yet his willingness to face the conundrums of good and evil led him to claim that “Those who would ground morality on the image of God in man may remember that Adolf Hitler and Adolf Eichmann were created in God’s image like you and me, and also every rapist and murderer as well as the most righteous of men. The ultimate message of the Day of Atonement, is that man, as such, has no intrinsic value; he acquires value insofar as he stands before God. . . . Man—any man—is by nature beast-like; it is only the service of God that raises him from nullity to significance and confers value upon him.”²⁰ The first part of this passage seems to say that even Hitler and Eichmann constitute that kind of limit to our moral will, are owed that kind of respect, whose character is conditioned by the fact that all human beings are created in God’s image. But the latter part of the passage appears to deny it and to claim instead that only those whose acts are intentionally in the service of God are raised from “nullity” and have value. But that is a wicked conclusion and cannot be what he means. It is unfortunate that Leibowitz should express himself so carelessly on a matter of such importance.

A similar difficulty affects his discussion of the story of Abraham and Isaac. He says that Abraham “suspended all human values for the sake of the service of God.”²¹ This is paralleled by his comment that “Faith requires one to subdue his inclinations,”²² which is reinforced with almost Nietzschean hubris: “The highest symbol of Jewish faith is the stance of Abraham on Mount Moriah, where all human values were annulled and overridden by fear and love of God. . . . The *Agedah* is man’s absolute mastery over his own nature—this nature includes all the benevolent sentiments as well as man’s conscience; all the actors in man’s make up which an atheistic humanism regards as ‘good.’ It was Abraham who first burst the bounds of the universal human bondage—the bondage of man to the forces of his own nature.”²³

These quotations reveal quite clearly that when Leibowitz spoke of Abraham “overcoming human values,” he spoke indiscriminately of, on the one hand, human desires, attachments, and longings—everything in fact which

Kant referred to as inclination—and, on the other hand, moral values. Indeed that such a homogenization of “human values” occurs in the perspective of religion seems exactly to be his point. But, while it makes sense to speak of forgoing or renouncing our longings and attachments, it makes dubious, if any, sense to speak of forgoing the requirements of morality.

The difficulty in the story of Abraham can be brought out this way. We cannot conceive that anyone who would try to do anything like what Abraham was prepared to do would for us be an exemplar of faith and love of God. Such a person we would say deserved to be locked up. This is not because we do not know what in our society would count as “sacrifice,” that is what today would count as “doing, or being prepared to do the same thing” as Abraham did or was prepared to do. Our central difficulty is that we cannot look on murder, rape, and torture as acts which could truly be “for the sake of God” or “for the sake of Heaven.” Now if we cannot conceive this—if it is part of our understanding of what it is for an act truly to be “for the sake of God” or “for the sake of Heaven” that we cannot conceive it—then the talk of abrogating all human values including the value of conscience is just rhetoric, empty rhetoric. On this view, someone like Yigal Amir who believes that murder can be done for the sake of God must be mistaken.

For that reason the story of Abraham differs markedly from the story of Job. But for Leibowitz, “The trial of Job is a duplicate trial of Abraham; both stories seek to teach the meaning of the fear of God.”²⁴ The lesson of Job for Leibowitz is that Job comes to love the world as God’s creation and stands fast in his love of God irrespective of what happens in the world. After God speaks to him from the whirlwind, Job’s love of God is no longer provisional on his approval of God’s management of the universe; his is no longer the kind of religiosity which is often expressed when people speak of “the problem of evil.” This gives substance to much of Leibowitz’s talk of a theocentric religion, of a religion which is not the servant of human needs. But it gives no support to the Nietzschean hubris which characterize some of his remarks. And whatever polemical point may be achieved by saying that religion does not serve human interests and needs, it is likely to be undermined if one takes that to mean that religion may be indifferent to human needs, human suffering, and human fears. A religion “worthy of the name” will offer a deepened perspective on them. Yet, paradoxically, Leibowitz is aware of this point and the power of his best religious writings depends on it: “The religion of Halakhah is concerned with man and addresses him in his drab day to day existence. The Mitzvot are a norm for the prosaic life that constitute the true and enduring condition of man. . . . Resting religions on Halakhah assigns to it the prosaic aspects of life and therein lies its great strength. Only a religion addressed to life’s prose, a religion of the dull routine of daily activity is worthy of the name—the fundamental and enduring aspects of human existence are in life’s prose and not in its poetry.”²⁵

Now listen to him on prayer: “The concept of prayer has two different meanings: first, prayer in the sense of ‘a prayer of the afflicted when he is faint

and pours out his complaint before God' (Ps 102:1); second, prayer as defined in the prayer book, which is more constitutive of Judaism than the Bible, since the latter was adopted by a large proportion of humanity who did not embrace Judaism." The prayer book "does not express the spontaneous outpourings of the soul. It contains a text of fixed prayer, imposed on one as a duty and not conditioned by his spiritual needs or by his feelings. The same eighteen benedictions are recited by the bridegroom before his wedding ceremony, the widower returning from the funeral of his wife, and the father who has buried his only son. Recitation of the identical set of psalms is the daily duty of the person enjoying the beauties and bounties of this world and the one whose world has collapsed. The same supplications are prescribed for those who feel the need for them and those who do not."²⁶ The psychological phenomenon of the soul's overflow is religiously irrelevant. That prayer is great when a person views a work and prays "regardless of whether or not it suits his taste. Everyone is capable of reciting verses of praise when in good spirits. To utter many Hallelujahs when one finds no joy in nature or in life is the act of a truly religious person, committed to prayer imprinted with the stamp of the sages."²⁷

These are wonderful examples of what Leibowitz means by "religion worthy of the name." Passages such as these, rather than definitions or his misleading philosophical explanations, best reveal why he says that true religion is theocentric. But they do not reveal that it is accidental to religion that it should illuminate rather than turn away from human life: that it should deepen rather than cheapen our understanding of our needs, fears, joys, and woes. The point is beautifully made by Simone Weil:

The soul's attitude towards God is not a thing that can be verified, even by the soul itself, because God is elsewhere, in heaven, in secret. If one thinks to have verified it, there is really some earthly thing masquerading under the label of God. One can only verify whether the behavior of the soul as regards this world hears the mark of an experience of God. . . . It is not the way a man talks about God, but the way he talks about the world that best shows whether his soul has passed through the fire of the love of God. . . . If I light an electric torch at night out of doors I don't judge its power by looking at the bulb, but by seeing how many objects it lights up. The brightness of a source of light is appreciated by the illumination it projects upon non-luminous objects. The value of a religious, or more generally a spiritual, way of life is appreciated by the amount of illumination thrown upon things of this world. Earthly things are the criterion of spiritual things. . . . If on the pretext that only spiritual things are of value, we refuse to take the light thrown on earthly things as a criterion, then we are in danger of having a non-existent treasure. Only spiritual things are of value, but only physical things have a verifiable existence. Therefore the value of the former can only be verified as an illumination projected on the latter. . . . If a man took my left-hand glove, passed it behind his back and returned it to me as a right-hand glove, I should know that he had access to the fourth dimension. No other proof is possible. In the same way, if a man gives bread to a beggar in a certain way or speaks in a certain way about a defeated army I know that his thought has been outside this world and sat with the Father who is in Heaven.²⁸

It was the way Leibowitz spoke and wrote of the injustices performed by those he called his people, and of the suffering of those who were not his people, which shows how fully religion informed his life and thought, and which makes it very moving.

NOTES

1. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, translated by Eliezer Goldman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 193–194.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 208–209.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
28. Quoted by J. J. Holmes in *The Efficacy of Religion* (Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1975), p. 92.

GARY PACERNICK

The Scholar

for Ben Zion Wacholder

You are blind to all
But the mind's light
Illuminating your being
Scholar decoding the scrolls
Learned in many languages
First you survived the darkness of Hitler
Then you overcame the darkness of blindness
To see the mind's light
Envisioning line after line of sacred text
You also serve like Homer and Milton
The holy word aspiring toward God.

GARY PACERNICK's most recent poetry collection is titled *Something Is Happening*. He is also the author of *The Jewish Poems*, a poetry collection that has been adapted for the stage and for Public Television. The author of critical studies, *Memory and Fire: Ten American Jewish Poets*, and *Sing a New Song: American Jewish Poetry Since the Holocaust*, he has also edited the poetry magazine, *Images*. He is currently professor of English at Wright State University. His poem, *All the Way to Budapest*, and his translation (with Bela Bognar) of *Forced March* by Miklos Radnoti appeared in *JUDAISM*, Winter 1996.

Marginalizing History: Observations on The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth-Century Spain by B. Netanyahu¹

MARTHA G. KROW - LUCAL

*In memory of
Bill and Evelyn Krow, my first teachers, and
S. Gilman, R. Lida, F. Ross and J. Silverman,
my teachers of Spanish literature*

THE DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR AND COLLECTOR OF SEPHARDIC ballads, Joseph H. Silverman (1924–1989) in expressing the dazzling complexity of Spanish Golden Age life and literature used to quote his teacher José F. Montesinos: “Has it not always been very Spanish, when we are obliged to choose between two things, for us to choose them both? Perhaps many . . . apparent contradictions may be resolved in a fierce desire to renounce nothing.”² The recognition of the intricacy of human life and society is essential to anyone who wishes to study either art or history—or their inevitable intersections. Generalizations are necessary to conceptualization, but they must be weighed and tested constantly against the evidence of individual lives and works of art. It is this recognition of multifaceted motives and actions that is missing from B. Netanyahu’s imposing 1400-page tome. The result is that the work is flawed in its conception, in spite of its overwhelming erudition and its exceptionally attentive readings of both pro- and anti-New Christian apologetics. It may seem bizarre to reproach such a lengthy work with leaving out too much, but the truth of the matter is that Netanyahu has gathered together a phenomenal amount of information which he never turns into the history that his data deserve. He treats only generalizations and elites, a history from the top that stops at the top, but that pretends to be global in scope.

Stephen Haliczer, in his valuable book on the Inquisition in Valencia, reminds us that in the 1960s “historians began to realize that the achievements of kings, princes and statesmen were not the whole of history or the whole of human activity. A growing number attempted to write history from the standpoint of the ordinary person, but in doing so, they had to explore nontraditional

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sources,”³ such as Inquisitorial records, legal records such as tax rolls and marriage registers, civil and criminal cases, etc. These historians revolutionized the writing of social history by studying the legal records of a handful of individuals (as Carlo Ginzburg did in *The Night Battles*, for example) or of one person alone (in *The Cheese and the Worms*), showing how much could be learned about the society in which they lived by examining their relations with others. People who had rarely received a passing glance from historians before—women, paupers, peasants, artisans, individual heretics—were suddenly able to illuminate the life of the past in a way that had been almost unthinkable previously, when only royalty and the great magnates were deemed worthy of notice.

This view of history can be exciting and threatening. Exciting, because it opens new windows on old history, and threatening, because the complexity of individual human lives makes it much more difficult to consider people and situations *en bloc*. Netanyahu, unfortunately, is either unaware of this relatively new kind of history, or is so disdainful of it that he ignores it completely. The effect is the same in either case: there is a vacuum where evidence supporting his positions should be. His book is a compendium of sweeping generalizations about vast heterogeneous groups, interpolated with examinations of rich, politically important men. Anyone who does not fall into these categories is outside his area of interest.⁴

The origins of the Inquisition are, according to Netanyahu, in the long term, Greek: “all forms of warfare against the Jews in the Diaspora had their origins in regions dominated demographically by Greek masses, inspired culturally by Greek civilization, and organized politically as the Eastern Roman Empire” (27). In the short term, he argues, the racist anti-Semitism of Christian Spain brought about an unfounded charge of crypto-Judaism (heresy according to the civil and Church laws of the time) among the *conversos*, ushering in the Inquisition. In the course of the 1400 pages of this book, Netanyahu affirms repeatedly that there were virtually no *converso* Judaizers, and argues that the Inquisition, therefore, was established solely to destroy the *conversos* (an affirmation that goes back to his 1966 book *The Marranos of Spain*).⁵ The overwhelming evidence, however, of a crypto-Jewish tradition in the Peninsula from the fifteenth century on, demonstrated by Inquisitorial records and the stream of Marrano refugees to Jewish communities in Europe and North Africa belie his assertions. The view that such complex behavior as anti-Semitism and such complex institutions as the Inquisition can be explained by one motive alone is, in any case, problematic at best.⁶

But before all else, it is necessary to define the terms in which the discussion is to be framed: who and what were these people that Netanyahu calls, interchangeably, “Conversos, Marranos and New Christians”?

Beginning with the anti-Jewish riots that swept Spain in 1391, a new, numerically substantial class of people came into existence. They had been born and raised as Jews, but converted (or were forcibly converted) to Christianity in the wake of the riots. Jews continued to convert (or be

converted) to Christianity in substantial numbers throughout the first quarter of the fifteenth century. Before this time there had been individual converts, but there had been no large class of such people.

According to Church and civil law of the time, these people were now Christians; whether they had become so willingly or under duress did not matter.⁷ All of them were nominal Christians and as such, under legal obligation to conform in belief and actions to Church doctrine and teachings. If they indulged in any non-Catholic practices, they were to be considered heretics and would fall under the jurisdiction of their bishop in Castile, the Papal Inquisition in Aragon, and finally (from the beginning of the 1480s on), the Spanish Inquisition.

This was their legal status, *not* a description of what they believed. Indeed, to try and generalize about the beliefs of so heterogeneous a group as the converts of 1391 and their descendants is impossible; oversimplification becomes distortion. The terminology used to describe them should be attentive, insofar as possible, to recognizable differences; and seemingly small questions of definition and terminology may alert readers to problems of greater depth. But Netanyahu writes: "Unless otherwise indicated, the terms *Conversos*, *Marranos* and *New Christians* are used in this work synonymously. Each of them has long served to designate the same group in Jewish, Spanish and European scholarship" (vii). This is misleading; popular usage and older historiography may have conflated the terms, but scholarly usage makes distinctions. Y. H. Yerushalmi, for instance, explains his use of the same terms with greater precision: "I have used the term 'Marrano' to denote only those men and women whose Judaizing propensities are either established or highly probable. Otherwise I have employed the religiously neutral term 'New Christian' which here merely indicates that the person is of known Jewish descent, but implies no ideological evaluation." And again, "although all New Christians may have been generically suspected of Judaizing, they were by no means all of them Judaizers. The 'Marranos' were *part* of the New Christian group, but were not coextensive with it."⁸ Netanyahu's refusal to recognize such distinctions is confusing, however consistent it may be in his book. Each of the terms has nuances that differentiate it from the others, and there are good reasons for emphasizing those differences.

Converso means one who has converted; from the late Middle Ages onward it was used to designate those who had converted from Judaism to Christianity, and their descendants. The term itself became so negatively charged that it was eventually replaced by "New Christian," which designated the same descent group. *Marrano* has other meanings; in Covarrubias' famous dictionary, the *Tesoro de la lengua castellana* (1611), the word itself, though derived by Covarrubias from the Arabic, is associated only with religiously delinquent Jewish converts.⁹ The present-day Royal Spanish Academy's *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* derives the word from the Arabic *mujarram*, "forbidden, prohibited, applied to pork" (its literal meaning in modern-day Spanish is, ironically enough, "pig"). A figurative meaning of *marrano* is "Applied . . . to *conversos* who practiced Judaism

(*judaizaban*) secretly” (the *Diccionario* entry for *converso* simply states: “said of Moors or Jews who converted to Christianity”). *Marrano*, as Yerushalmi indicates, would signify certain activities, rather than simply indicating a descent group. These are important distinctions in terminology which reflect distinctions in actions; the conflation of the terms, which are not synonymous, blurs crucial differences.

The central conceptual problem of Netanyahu’s work is this tendency to over-generalize, to ignore nuances. For example:

1. Before beginning his studies years ago, he writes, he believed that “almost all the Marranos were crypto-Jews who followed the laws of Judaism” (xvi); now he believes that “the conversos were indeed overwhelmingly Christian and bent upon a course of complete assimilation” (xix). That is, he goes from one extreme to the other without ever considering the more nuanced evidence of records of individual lives in terms of, say, socioeconomic status and gender. He never stops considering the *conversos* as a homogeneous bloc, eliding Yerushalmi’s and other scholars’ well-documented and necessary distinctions. And he sidesteps the thorny question of who and what was a Jew by asserting vaguely that it was someone who “followed the laws of Judaism.”

2. Netanyahu attempts to generalize about the religious beliefs and activities of all *conversos* from 1391 on. All the descendants of these converts, at least through the time of the Expulsion, are included in his generalizations.¹⁰

3. He generalizes about the “religious beliefs” of this extremely heterogeneous group by examining “every piece of Marrano [written] evidence touching the conversos’ religious position and carefully weigh[ing] its merits” (xx), ignoring the fact that those who were able to write and publish were a minuscule percentage—upper-class, wealthy, educated, and male—of all *conversos*, and cannot be considered a representative sample of the whole group and its diverse beliefs. This is completely aside from the fact that it is absurd to expect that in their published writings “*conversos* would do other than present themselves as good faithful Christians.”¹¹

In other words, he relies on a posited homogeneity of group members, on either/or polarizations, and on the (over)use of information about elites which he extrapolates to larger populations. The complexities of class and gender, of historical and human motivations, of being not one thing *or* the other but one *and* the other, of what Primo Levi calls “the gray zone,”¹² are a dead letter as far as Netanyahu is concerned. Some examples follow.

He accepts unquestioningly certain classifications of Peninsular peoples. For instance, he writes of the flight of many Jews from Muslim Spain after the Almohad invasion (twelfth century) and “the condition of the Jews as a minority group within the great majority of the native Spaniards” (66). Here, not for the first or only time, he draws (or accepts) a completely untenable distinction between “Jews” and “native Spaniards.” It is likely that the first Jewish communities in the Iberian Peninsula were established before the arrival of the Visigoths (fifth century C.E.), and certainly there were Jews under subsequent Visigothic,

Muslim, and Christian rule; thus were Jews not as “native” as any other denizens of the Peninsula.²¹³ Netanyahu rightly excoriates the anti-Jewish and anti-*converso* forces of Christian Spain for their attacks on Jews and *conversos*, but he accepts and uses their racist terminology and distinctions without question when he refers to Jews and Muslims. In point of fact, the human tragedy of the Expulsions—of the Jews and later (1609–1614) of the descendants of Spanish Muslims, the Moriscos—was precisely that Spaniards who were as “native” as any Christian Spaniard were torn from their native land and society.¹⁴ If Netanyahu does not believe or recognize this, it may be because he is emphasizing implicitly the view that Jews cannot truly belong to any Diaspora society. In that case it would be perfectly logical for him to agree wholeheartedly with the anti-Jewish Christians of Spain who viewed Jews whose families had lived in the Peninsula for centuries as “non-Spaniards.”

Netanyahu’s generalizations concerning peoples as blocs in which every individual is identical to every other member of the group are especially troubling. In the Introduction he writes, harking back to his book on *The Marranos of Spain*: “Marrano Christianization had been steadily advancing for three generations (from 1391 on), so that at the beginning of the 1480s, when the Spanish Inquisition was established, virtually all Jewish authorities in Spain and elsewhere regarded the mass of the Marranos as *renegades*—that is, as *apostates* or *gentiles*. By any of these definitions they were Christians, and in no way Judaizers or crypto-Jews” (xviii). This thesis remains the motivating force in the present book. But we must examine the presuppositions contained in these few sentences.

Certainly all the “Marranos” were, by definition, baptized Christians. But does this mean that they all were “in no way Judaizers or crypto-Jews”? Haliczer, writing about the first years of the Valencian Inquisition (the 1480s), sees three main tendencies among the *conversos* of Valencia: “those who did everything possible to maintain a Judaic style of life and were Jewish in all but name, those who believed in and practiced both Judaism and Catholicism simultaneously, and those who believed themselves to be fervent Catholics” (211–12). He goes on to cite the “rich and devout Jewish life-style led by Valencian notary Pedro Alfonso and his family [attesting] to the continued strength of Judaism among the *conversos* long after they had been all but written off by rabbinical observers in both Spain and North Africa” (212). This included observance of the Sabbath, the laws of *kashrut*, and all major Jewish holidays and, writes Haliczer, building “the ritual Succoth hut with his own hands” (212). He also “contributed money and oil to the synagogue,” “gave charity to poor Jews,” and “would send flour to the ghetto so that Jewish bakers could bake matzo for Passover” (213). He also mentions the *conversa* Brianda Besant of Teruel, who “paid for a reserved seat [in the synagogue] there so that she could attend prayers on the High Holy Days” (213).

Haliczer does not even mention two other well-documented phenomena studied by other scholars: what Albert Sicoff has called “negative crypto-

Judaism” (that is, a more or less cautious disrespect for Christian sacraments and doctrine, rather than an active practice of Judaism which would cost the practitioner his/her life if discovered),¹⁵ and the skepticism Stephen Gilman discovers in the case of Fernando de Rojas’ father-in-law.¹⁶ How can all these possible behaviors—and many, many more—all be classified disdainfully as those of “Christians, and in no way Judaizers or crypto-Jews”? Can a crypto-Jew who is unable to practice Judaism openly be considered a Jew? Jewish authorities differed, and Netanyahu never explains the relevant criteria (his or theirs), except very indirectly. When he does attempt to recreate the thought processes of a “typical” *converso*, he unwittingly underlines how just narrow his definitions are:

Since most Jews sympathized with the forced convert’s plight, they would usually give him the benefit of the doubt when they saw him violate Jewish law; they tended to assume that on such occasions, he considered it perilous to expose his Jewishness. It was of course natural that many a convert took advantage of this prevailing Jewish attitude and permitted himself to be rather lax in the fulfillment of the Commandments. He knew that his failure to act like a Jew would be excused not only by his fellow converts, but also by most Jews, who “understood” his predicament and trusted his judgment as to what he could or could not do as a forced convert. On the other hand, he could not expect such “understanding” from Christians should they find him violating Christian law or custom. (208)

Were male *Jews* who were “lax” in fulfilling all the commandments no longer considered Jews by their communities? It seems doubtful. Women did not have to fulfill the same commandments as men; does this mean they were not Jews—or were they simply unimportant in Netanyahu’s view?

Generalizing about the “mass” of *conversos* is exceedingly risky. Yerushalmi correctly observes that no monolithic statement about *conversos* is acceptable; we can envision no situation whereby *all* of them—men and women, rich and poor, thirteenth century and fifteenth century, Castilian and Aragonese—reacted to conversion, theirs or that of their ancestors, in the same way. He also warns: “we must not approach the problem [of ‘Marranism’] with preconceived notions as to what constitutes ‘Jewishness’ nor, least of all, with legalistic definitions. Rather than superimpose external criteria which derive from traditional Jewish life and behavior, thereby ignoring the genuine peculiarities of the Converso position, we should . . . confine ourselves to an inductive method” (31). One of Netanyahu’s chief failings in this book is that he does exactly what Yerushalmi cautions against: he implicitly defines ‘Jewishness’ in a completely legalistic fashion deriving from male-normative traditional Jewish life. When he does not find most *conversos* behaving in that way, he pronounces them renegades and sweeps on.

Who then were Netanyahu’s Jewish authorities in fifteenth-century Spain who regarded the *conversos* as apostates, and what might they know? Perhaps they knew a good deal about their own *aljama* (Jewish community) and region, but the Iberian Peninsula consisted at that time of the kingdoms of Portugal, Castile, and Aragon (not counting Navarre, allied with France at the

time, and the vassal Nasrid kingdom of Granada). Within each kingdom each individual *aljama* had a direct and official relationship with the crown, but each was also totally independent of all other *aljamas* in terms of civil and religious law. What might the Jewish authorities of Montoro (Córdoba) know about the *conversos* of Burgos in the north? What might the authorities of Murcia know about life in Avila? What might Hasdai Crescas of Aragon know about the practices of *conversos* in Zamora? Despite Netanyahu's detailed study of prestigious sources, this remains an unanswered question. And the fact that *some* (not all) Jewish authorities regarded all *conversos* as apostates and gentiles does not make it so;¹⁷ after all, the Inquisition and the Spanish State regarded people of New Christian descent as potential or actual Jews. Netanyahu is justifiably outraged by the blood-purity statutes and the accusations that penalized all *conversos*, but he engages in exactly the same sort of sweeping classification—from the other side.

As for the Jewish authorities outside Spain, both before and after the Expulsion, what they knew about the religious practices of *conversos* was necessarily partial and based on hearsay. Netanyahu paraphrases a *responsum* (c. 1450) by the Algerian Rabbi Solomon Durán that calls the *conversos* "totally ignorant of Judaism and its commandments and, consequently, what it stands for" (411). The author uses this statement to support the 1449 assertion of the Relator¹⁸ Fernán Díaz de Toledo that the New Christians of his time are the offspring of the converts of 1391 and shortly after, and: "I do not see how one can designate as 'converts' those who are children and grandchildren of Christians; *those who were born in Christianity and do not know anything about Judaism or its rites*" (emphasis in Netanyahu, 410). Netanyahu uses this statement to assert: "This is a direct testimony about the state of Judaism among the Marranos . . . by one of the most responsible representatives of the *converso* society at the time. Briefly, it tells us that in the middle of the fifteenth century—that is, prior to the Toledan persecution—Judaism among the Marranos was practically nonexistent. It is not an isolated testimony, we should stress, but one that fits with other testimonies, highly reliable and highly authoritative, which have come down to us from those times" (411).

The context, form, and rhetorical nature¹⁹ of Fernán Díaz's testimony makes its reliability, at best, problematic, while Durán's testimony is based on hearsay (Durán's family had left Spain for North Africa at the end of the fourteenth century). The fact that both men were highly respectable and leaders of their communities says nothing about their direct knowledge of the practices of *conversos* in the Peninsula; indeed, the fact that both were men of high position argues *against* their knowing a great deal about what lower-class people in various locales were doing. The pro-*converso* advocacy of the Relator's writing makes it unlikely that he would confess to knowledge of *converso* crypto-Judaism, even if he knew of it (and how many crypto-Jews would willingly make such information available to a Notary of the Royal Chamber?). As for Durán's beliefs about *conversos* around 1450, it would

behoove us to find out something more about the actual problem he was addressing in the *responsum*, and to know more about his own community and how he saw it affected by the *conversos*.

Yerushalmi make a clear and cogent argument, which I quote at length because it is an exemplary analysis of the problem of trying to define the “Jewishness of the *conversos*”:

When the rabbis of the Sephardic diaspora dealt with the question of the “Jewishness” of the Marranos in the Responsa, their frame of reference was quite clear. They were almost invariably preoccupied with the very real problem of the *legal* status of the Marrano *as it affected their own community* [emphasis in original]. They were forced to deal with the concrete problems which arose whenever Marrano emigrants arrived in a Jewish center and difficult cases had to be settled concerning marriage and divorce, levirate ties, inheritance, and a host of other legal complications. In assessing, whether positively or negatively, the Jewish status of the Conversos who were still in Spain or Portugal, each rabbi must have had in mind the practical consequences of his broad definition for the specific cases which came before him. The rabbinic evaluations of the Jewishness of the Conversos were therefore derived from a consideration of the problems of the emigrants interacting with the diaspora communities, rather than an objective appraisal of Marrano life within the Peninsula (25).

He then goes on to give the example of the difficulties caused by the issue of levirate marriage for a childless, widowed *conversa* who had left the Peninsula to live as a Jew, but whose *levir* (the brother-in-law) remained there and would not travel abroad to perform the requisite release ceremony which would allow her to remarry according to Jewish law. If the *conversos* were to be considered Jews and the brother-in-law refused to come and release her, then a young woman who wished to marry within Jewish law and raise Jewish children would be prevented from doing so—ever. Who would weigh more heavily: the young woman in the rabbi’s community or an unknown *converso* brother-in-law hundreds of miles away? Who was more likely to be hurt by the answer, and at what cost? The answers cannot be assured, but the questions must be raised.

Netanyahu’s oversimplified analyses of the “mass of *conversos*” are exacerbated by his lack of attention to class and gender differences. The *converso* historian Fernando del Pulgar, for example, (1430?–1493?) wrote an open letter to the archbishop of Seville, Cardinal Pedro González de Mendoza, concerning the cruelty of Inquisitorial sentences meted out to the *conversos* in Seville in the early 1480s, pleading the case of the *conversa* girls who followed their parents’ Judaizing example: “since the Old [Christians of Andalusia] are such bad ones [i.e., Christians], the new ones are such good Jews. No doubt, sir, I believe that there are ten thousand girls in Andalusia between the ages of ten and twenty, who have never left their houses since they were born, nor have they ever heard or known any doctrine but the one they have observed in their parents performing behind closed doors.”²⁰

Julio Caro Baroja observes: “The most important thing [in Pulgar’s commentary on the events] is that it shows us why the women, brought up in a narrow familial framework, without reading and schooling, without the kind of comparative elements that produce doubt or change, were always such stubborn Judaizers and exercised so much influence on the faith of their children and their relations” (I, 147).²¹

Here Caro Baroja raises a question that many historians have remarked upon, but that Netanyahu never addresses: who were the women *conversos* and Marranos? Since Netanyahu denies that there *was* a crypto-Jewish tradition, it is easy for him to refuse even to consider the possible importance of women as guardians and imparters of crypto-Judaism.²² Thus it is unnecessary to account for the many *conversa* women arrested by the Inquisition for everything from not cooking on the Sabbath to “sweeping the house the wrong way” (*varrer a casa as avessas*, in Portuguese),²³ or for women like Cathalina Tarongí, burned alive at the stake in a Mallorcan *auto da fe* (1691) because she refused to renounce Judaism.²⁴

The fact is that women are virtually invisible in this work, from the humble ones like Teresa de Lucena, who helped her father Juan set up and run one of the first Hebrew printing presses in Spain in the 1480s, to the Ruling Queen of Castile herself.²⁵ Describing all *conversos* in terms that apply only to male-normative Judaism, presenting the part as the whole, is a serious flaw in this historiography. Ignoring the existence of women altogether in a study that purports to be about the “mass of the *conversos*” (half of whom were female) is unscholarly in the extreme. And when he does examine an individual life in detail, it is that of a King, a royal favorite, a churchman, a *converso* courtier—always an elite man. The elites are well-represented; the lower classes as individuals are, like women, ignored.

Let us return to the Relator’s belief (in which Netanyahu concurs) about the *conversos* of the 1400s: “‘Born’ as Christians, they knew from infancy only their native religion—Christianity—and thus had no notion whatever of Judaism, either in theory or in practice. And since they were *unaware* [emphasis in Netanyahu] of it, they obviously could not follow it” (410). It would be interesting to know who these “unaware” *conversos* were, because information concerning individual lives (as opposed to vast generalizations about “masses”) indicates that there were many *conversos* who had knowledge of Judaism, both in theory and in practice. Two short examples will suffice.

Alvaro de Montalbán, father-in-law of Fernando de Rojas (author of the *Celestina*), was arrested by the Inquisition twice, once in the 1480s and once in 1525. Stephen Gilman summarizes the autobiographical information that Montalbán gave to the inquisitors in 1525 (we must remember that it was to Montalbán’s advantage to *understate* any possible Jewish contacts):

Back in the 70s of the fifteenth century, Alvaro de Montalbán and his eight brothers and sisters, although grandchildren of a baptized Christian, Garcí Alvarez de Montalbán, lived in a milieu which was to a great extent still Jewish in its customs, attitudes, relationships and reactions. It was a world in which the

conversos were only nominally different from their Jewish fellow townsmen [in La Puebla de Montalbán, Toledo]. Alvaro de Montalbán's first love affair was with a Jewess . . . ; his bread was unleavened, his family purchased meat from the Jewish butcher. . . . His only "law" seems to have been that of his Jewish ancestors and companions: "At times I would go into the synagogue of the Jews and into their tabernacles" [i.e., the *sukko*].

. . . At times the only meat available in the Puebla was that slaughtered in the Jewish fashion. Even observance of Jewish rites hardly corresponded to a conscious program of deception: when he and other Christians went into the tabernacles, it was only in order to have a good time with the Jews. Since all this was such a long time ago, he doesn't remember if he entered with the intention of worshipping as a Jew. On the other hand, since he has already confessed that he ate the unleavened bread with the intention of obeying the law of Moses, maybe he did enter the aforesaid *cabañuelas* [i.e., *sukko*] with the same intention, but he doesn't remember. (72-73)

And Gilman adds: "One senses genuine puzzlement in the old man as he looks back on the *temps perdu* of his youth—before the coming of the Inquisition" (72-73).

A century and a half later on the island of Mallorca, a *chueta* (Mallorcan for *converso*), Raphael Benito Tarongí, remembered that his teacher Raphael Mayor had told him that "to be saved in the Law of Moses it was necessary to be circumcised." Since, the Inquisitorial records state, he was "resolved upon living and dying as a Jew, without fearing any punishment, he decided to do it himself." According to his trial record, "he circumcised himself with a piece of glass in his cell." He almost died, but refused all medical treatment. In order to keep him from dying then, "it was necessary to put him in with Raphael Valls Mayor, who was his good friend and obstinate, like this prisoner, in wishing to live and die as a Jew."²⁶

Of course, if the "crypto-Judaism" of the *conversos* is all a conspiracy invented by the Inquisition to destroy them, and backed by the anti-Semitic power of the Spanish State, then we may do as Netanyahu does: ignore all Inquisitorial documents as unworthy of attention. Typically, he over-simplifies. He suggests that the persecution of the *conversos* as crypto-Jews was due to the overweening desire of the Inquisition for power and its thirst (along with the Crown's) for the fruit of *converso* confiscations. There can be no doubt that this is true; these factors were very important. However, as Angela Selke writes, the bad faith or greed of the accusers "does not convert the victims *ipso facto* into good and Catholic Christians."²⁷ Persecution by the Inquisition was appalling enough; to attempt to "rehabilitate" its victims by claiming they were not really Judaizers, she points out, "implicitly justifies [such] persecutions if they were based on accusations that were true."²⁸ To deny that (1) the Inquisitors believed there were crypto-Jews, and (2) there *were* appreciable numbers of crypto-Jews is too great a leap. As proof of the Inquisition's genuine alarm concerning crypto-Judaism, one more example is in order: a Mallorcan crypto-Jew, Pedro Onofre Cortés, owned a piece of land which he used as a fruit garden/orchard.

In the garden a number of other crypto-Jews used to join with him in celebrating Jewish holidays. When he was “reconciled” (i.e., punished and his goods and property confiscated, but not otherwise physically harmed) in the 1679 Mallorcan *auto da fe*, the Inquisition took possession of his garden and, in the presence of the ecclesiastical and civil dignitaries of the city, “demolished it, plowed it under and sowed it with salt.”²⁹ A plaque was placed in the center of the destroyed garden which read: “Year 1679 this garden was demolished and sowed with salt by order of the Inquisition because the Law of Moses was taught in it. None may break or take away this stone at any time, under pain of excommunication.”³⁰ It remained there until the nineteenth century.

If the Inquisition had simply been interested in economic gain, it could have taken the land for its own use, or rented it out. To destroy for generations a fertile piece of land—on an island!—by sowing it with salt is a strong symbolic statement that indicates another type of concern.

There are several problems with the view that Inquisitorial records are worthless because there were no crypto-Jews; *ergo*, the records are fabrications. One is that they were kept rigorously secret from the inception of the institution until the Napoleonic invasion of 1808.³¹ The logic of a large group of people (inquisitors) fabricating falsehoods which were only seen by others involved in fabricating similar falsehoods is shaky.³² But even without debating his conspiracy theory of Inquisitorial records, a field of research that he does not take into account shows that his theory of a totally Christian and assimilationist *converso* class, completely unaware of Judaism, is incorrect.³³

For over thirty years, Samuel Armistead and Joseph Silverman studied the Spanish ballads (*romances*) sung by the Sephardic Jews who settled in Mediterranean communities after the Expulsion. The ballad form has remained a living matrix for song generation down to the present day among Spanish speakers all over the world. The songs the Sephardim took with them in their exile from the Peninsula are an invaluable window on certain aspects of late fifteenth-century Spanish culture; many of the songs collected from informants by scholars in the twentieth century came out of Spain in 1492. From the oldest Carolingian ballads to the historical ones of the late Reconquest, representatives of most ballad types can be found in the Sephardic repertoire.

In 1982 Armistead and Silverman published a careful study of what they called the “Christian substrate of the Sephardic *Romancero*.”³⁴ Though the ballads have been sung by Jews for centuries, they contained and contain innumerable references to “Christian institutions, festivals, rites and saints.”³⁵ The two scholars found that even though certain (not all, by any means) Christian references are omitted from the Sephardic ballads, the underlying ideology remains Christian because the Hispanic ballad form, “no matter who might have decided to cultivate it, had its origins in the Medieval heroic poetry of the militantly Christian Castilians.” Thus “it is from the dominant Christian caste that the Spanish Jews of the High Middle Ages had to acquire their *romancero*” (145). And this Christian substrate in songs sung by Jews means that

there was constant contact between Jews and Christians for centuries, for otherwise the Sephardim could not have learned these songs and this tradition, and created new ballads within the same artistic tradition after the Expulsion. Even if we wish to discount all Inquisitorial documents, we cannot discount this living cultural evidence of what Américo Castro has called *convivencia*—a living together that makes possible cultural exchange and intermingling. Even if all the *conversos* were true Christians and ardent assimilationists (a sweeping generalization that is belied by the records of individual lives left in *responso* and Jewish communities across the world), Jews knew them and they knew Jews. And together, as Spaniards, they created and preserved an art form that is living proof of their *convivencia*.

The final failure of Netanyahu's work, then, is one of failing to see and portray the richness of human lives and societies. The author insists on finding *one* explanation and one only—"the right explanation" (1048)—for a situation that stretched over centuries and included hundreds of thousands of people. Such rigidity must lead to distortion, as it does in this book. Having decided that "virtually" all *conversos* were utterly and completely devout Christians and thus not in any way Jewish, he proceeds to write the kind of history that Christopher Browning has termed a "keyhole history . . . view[ing] events through a single narrow vantage point that blocks out context and perspective."³⁶ One example only among dozens: Netanyahu writes that "[In 1351] The cities demanded that the Jews be segregated, live in separate boroughs, and be marked off as inferior both in appearance and in civil rights. Thus, they asked the King [Pedro I] that Jews be forbidden to use Christian names, wear precious clothes, and engage Christian nurses for their infants. It is amazing that such matters occupied their minds at a time when the kingdom was beset with urgent problems touching the health, security and livelihood of the great majority of the people" (95).

It so happens that the gathering (*Cortes*) at which this demand was presented came at the end of the first passage of bubonic plague through Europe, an apocalyptic epidemic because the population had never been previously exposed and so lacked antibodies to it. By the time the disease had run its course in the Mediterranean basin, "between 35% and 40% of the overall population had perished" (53)³⁷—causing urgent problems indeed.

Carlo Ginzburg examines the persecution of Jews and lepers in France during the same period, but without the superciliousness of Netanyahu: "By 1348 the plague was spreading unchecked, and people were dropping like flies. Identification of the human culprits offered the illusion of it being possible to do something to halt the epidemic" (65).³⁸ Behind the labels "common people," "anti-Semites," and so on, Ginzburg looks for complex human beings whose actions can rarely be ascribed to one motive alone. For all anyone knew at the time, the plague was a scourge of God, and perhaps (the Christians may have believed) if they persecuted the "deicide" Jews, God's anger might be assuaged. Not true and not pleasant, but understandable in the context of the time. And such reasoning has certainly not disappeared; we of the modern world cannot

lay claim to unfaltering, dispassionate, and rational recognition of the causes and effects of all calamities.

But least of all can we understand history as a parade of completely discrete groups that are adequately classified by one description alone. It is for this reason that the book fails ultimately: despite the tremendous research that Netanyahu has done, his simplistic conclusions never do justice to the multifaceted story of the Inquisition's origins in the Papal and Peninsular societies that spawned it. Nor do they do justice to those the Inquisition persecuted, the *conversos*—whose stories must include the complexities of individual lives that do not fit into neat, prefabricated categories. The book is like the skeleton of a skyscraper after a fire: from a distance it may seem like a building, but up close it is lifeless. Netanyahu's 1400 pages are filled with institutions, written apologetics, decrees and the trappings of the powerful. But the people whose songs may be heard even now, more than half a millennium later, are gone. Indeed, in this book they were never there.

NOTES

1. B. Netanyahu, *Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (New York: Random House, 1995).

2. J. F. Montesinos, *Ensayos y estudios de literatura española* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1970), pp. 188–89. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. I am deeply grateful to S. Armistead, E. Bergmann, M. and G. Caspi, D. and J. Rees, and A. Sicroff for their thoughtful criticism and their generous engagement in an ongoing dialogue concerning Netanyahu's book.

3. Stephen Haliczzer, *Inquisition and Society in the Kingdom of Valencia, 1478–1834* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford: University of California Press, 1990). p. 2.

4. Netanyahu does include an extensive analysis of the anti-*converso* Memorial of Marcos García de Mora, a leader of the *común* (the Toledan lower classes) during the 1449 rebellion that produced the first blood-purity statute. García was the son of a peasant who managed to become of “bachelor of law” (unusual for that time), was allied with Pedro Sarmiento during the Toledo uprising, and was killed by a crowd gathered by Prince Enrique (later Enrique IV) in December 1449. Here is the exception that proves the rule; the fact that García left a written anti-*converso* apologetic (very probably never printed but circulated in manuscript form) with which Netanyahu can argue and to which he can impute far-reaching popular support is the only reason for the appearance of such a lowly personage in this history.

5. B. Netanyahu, *The Marranos of Spain from the Late XIVth to the Early XVIth Century* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966).

6. Haliczzer writes: “I cannot accept [the] interpretation of the role of Valencia's inquisitors as the docile clients and servants of the Inquisitor-Generals who appointed them. Once in Valencia, the inquisitors were far from the reproving eye of inquisitor-general or Suprema, and each man tended to interpret for himself the role of provincial inquisitor. I have chosen to illustrate this point by telling the stories of several of the inquisitors who served on the tribunal at different stages of its history, because it is only by recounting the stories themselves that I can demonstrate to—and evoke for—readers the extent to which inquisitors responded to the needs and opportunities offered by local conditions” (6). His point is that the Inquisition itself was not monolithic; the one in Valencia was different from that of the Balearic Islands, which in turn was different from that of Castile, which in turn differed from the Portuguese Inquisition. And all of these Inquisitions differed greatly over time; the Valencian one was not the same in 1525 as it was in 1625 or 1725; as Haliczzer notes: “The Inquisition in Valencia was founded at a supreme moment of religious fanaticism and strong centralization. As a new and weak institution, it needed and received strong royal protection. By

the middle of the sixteenth century, however, local forces were reasserting themselves. After sustaining a series of defeats in conflicts with the cathedral chapter, the jurats, and other institutions, the tribunal found itself largely abandoned by the crown and the Suprema. The tribunal's gradual evolution into a primarily Valencian institution was, therefore, motivated by necessity, the necessity of survival in a world where regional interests had become paramount" (8).

7. Between the forced conversions of Jews in the Rhineland during the First Crusade and the forced conversions of 1391 lay the watershed of the thirteenth-century Albigensian heresy in southern France. Some Jews who had converted under threat of death in the Rhineland were allowed to renounce their conversion and rejoin the Jewish community, since forced conversion was not considered valid. But the widespread Albigensian heresy (which gave birth to the first Inquisition – the Papal Inquisition) brought about a change in attitude toward backsliders (*relapsi*). By the time of the 1391 pogroms, the Church considered the water of baptism indelible; forced conversions were not looked upon with favor, but they were confirmed *ex post facto*.

8. Y. H. Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto. Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. xv, pp. 11–12. Or I. S. Révah, who calls “the ‘Judaism’ of the Marranos . . . essentially a *potential* Judaism which entry into a Jewish community transformed, most often, into a real Judaism,” see “Les marranes,” *Revue des études juives* CVIII (1950–1960): 55.

9. “MARRANO. Es el rezién convertido al christianismo, y tenemos ruin concepto dél por averse convertido fingidamente. Diego Velázquez, en un librito que hizo intitulado *Defensio statuti Toletani*, dize assi: *Sed eos hispani marranos vocare solemus, qui ex iudaëis* [my emphasis] *descendentes et baptizati ficti christiani* [my emphasis: ‘false Christians’] *sunt*.” See Sebastián de Covarrubias Horozco, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* [1611] (Madrid: Ed. Turner, 1979).

10. An attempt, say, to consider St. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) the same as her grandfather, Juan Sánchez de Toledo, reconciled (along with his children) for Judaizing by the Inquisition in Toledo in 1485, simply because both were *conversos*, is obviously ludicrous. How much more impossible must it be to try and include thousands of people over the course of centuries in one homogeneous bloc?

11. Professor Albert Sicroff, personal letter, 11/26/96. For a discussion of “underground faiths” in England (Jacobean Catholics), Spain (crypto-Jews), and other Catholic countries (“Nicodemists” or secret Protestants), see Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

12. In his usual exemplary fashion Levi points out: “[The] *desire* for simplification is justified, but the same does not always apply to simplification itself, which is a working hypothesis, useful as long as it is recognized as such and not mistaken for reality. The greater part of historical and natural phenomena are not simple, or not simple in the way that we would like” (37); see Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, translated by Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Summit Books/Simon & Schuster, 1988).

13. Samuel Armistead and Joseph Silverman answer the question succinctly: “It has often been asked why the Sephardic Jews sang *romances* in Spain and have continued to sing them centuries after their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula. Well, the Sephardic Jews sang ballads because they were Spaniards, Spaniards of Jewish origin, but as Spanish as the Visigoths, the Germanic invaders of the Peninsula who would be deified by ‘official’ Spanish history.” See “The Traditional Balladry of the Sephardic Jews: A Collaborative Research Project,” *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* (Rome) (Set.-Ott.-Nov.-Dic. 1983): 641–67.

14. Considering the tenor of the whole book, it is depressing but not surprising that Netanyahu virtually ignores the other group of non-Christian Spaniards: the Moriscos. One of the few references to them in this immense work comes near the end, and is breathtaking in its sloppiness: “In the case of the Moriscos, Spain had to deal with a basically anti-Christian, anti-assimilationist and anti-Spanish element that could hardly merge with Spain’s culture and society” (1048). Many Moriscos might have been anti-Christian and anti-assimilationist (though it would be useful to see some of the available evidence, rather than just generalization), but they were most definitely Spanish and part of “Spain’s culture and society”; they could not possibly “merge” with what they were already part of.

15. He examines the phenomenon in his well-known article, “Clandestine Judaism in the Hieronymite Monastery of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe,” in *Studies in Honor of M. J. Bernardete*,

edited by Izaak A. Langnas and Barton Sholod (New York: Las Américas Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 89–125. He returns to a closer examination of the hostility of one *converso* monk towards Catholicism in his “El caso del judaizante jerónimo Fray Diego de Marchena,” *Homenaje a Antonio Rodríguez-Moñino*, Vol. 2 (Madrid: Ed. Castalia, 1966), pp. 227–33.

16. Alvaro de Montalbán was denounced to the Inquisition in 1525 for saying: “Let me be well-off down here, since I don’t know if there’s anything beyond,” apparently a common saying among *conversos*; see Stephen Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 82. For a review of the case against him, see especially pp. 67–98. He takes his information from the original Inquisitorial documents published by Manuel Serrano y Sanz in 1902.

17. Albert Sicroff suggested in a review of Netanyahu’s previous book that “Netanyahu has chosen to emphasize only one of the two poles between which Jewish opinion oscillated on the Marrano question, that which castigated the Marranos as apostates who were becoming increasingly assimilated in Christian society”; see A. A. Sicroff’s review in *Midstream* Vol. 12, No. 8 (October 1966): 71–75, especially 74.

18. Netanyahu never defines the term *Relator* for readers; it means a “legal officer whose job is to summarize (*hacer relación*) the warrants or legal files in the higher tribunals” (*Dicc. de la Real Acad. Esp.*). The full title of the Relator’s pro-*converso* apologetic is *The Instruction of the Relator to the Bishop of Cuenca, Don Lope de Barrientos*, as Netanyahu notes on p. 393.

19. Netanyahu appears to take seriously, for example, the Relator’s claim that there were fewer than *ten conversos* in Toledo in 1449 who might even have considered fleeing Spain to practice Judaism freely in another country (410). Aside from the fact that it is not susceptible to proof (nor was it when the Relator wrote it), its appearance in a pro-*converso* apologetic underlines its rhetorical (rather than descriptive) nature.

20. The text appears in Fernando del Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, edited by Juan de Mata Carriazo (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1943), pp. XLIX–LI; Francisco Cantera Burgos reproduces it with an extensive commentary on Pulgar, a *converso* himself, and several of his letters in his “Fernando del Pulgar y los conversos,” *Sefarad* 4 (1944): 295–345.

21. Julio Caro Baroja, *Los judíos en la España moderna y contemporánea*, 3 vols. (Madrid: Arion, 1961).

22. Certainly Netanyahu never addresses the fascinating discovery of crypto-Jews in Portugal in the 1920s by the Polish Jewish engineer, Samuel Schwarz. Schwarz published his findings in *Os cristãos-novos em Portugal no século XX* (Lisbon, 1925), and extracts were published in English in *The Menorah Journal* 12: 2–3 (1926): 138–49; 282–97. He writes of slowly gaining the confidence of the men of Belmonte, a small town in the northern Portuguese province of Beira-Baixa: “[they] began to offer me hints and scraps of information about their Jewish rites and prayers. I was surprised, however, to learn that it was the womenfolk, especially the old women, who knew the prayers in their entirety by heart, who recited them in the communal gatherings, and who in fact presided over their Jewish religious rites and ceremonies” (*Menorah Journal* 143). He witnessed the ceremonies led by these women and wrote down the prayers that they, illiterate even in their native Portuguese (they had never heard of Hebrew), dictated to him. Schwarz was able to recognize these crypto-Jews whose culture had survived the oppression of four centuries; would Netanyahu be willing to do the same? It seems doubtful.

23. This was a common charge: that Judaizers swept household dirt not out the door and into the street, but from the entrance back into the house. Edward Glaser, in his study of sermons preached at Portuguese *autos da fé*, remarks that it is the Judaizing custom most often mentioned and ridiculed by the preachers. Perhaps Netanyahu would classify this too as a plot hatched by the Inquisition against the *conversos*, who were virtually all true Christians (or perhaps since women did more sweeping than men, he would consider the whole question unimportant). But Yerushalmi quotes a seventeenth-century Hebrew source by Moses Hagiz, which explains that “long ago it was a custom of the Spanish Jews not to sweep through the doorway *out of reverence for the ‘mezuzah’ on the doorpost*” (p. 37, emphasis in Yerushalmi).

24. See Angela Selke, *Los chuetas y la Inquisición* (Madrid: Taurus, 1972), pp. 62–65. Those who renounced Judaism and accepted Christianity were mercifully garroted before being burned at the stake. Only those who were obstinate in their “sin” (Judaism) were burned alive.

25. Netanyahu consistently translates the title *Reyes Católicos* (conferred on Ferdinand and Isabella in 1494 by the Pope) as the “Catholic Kings.” The correct translation should be “Catholic Monarchs” or “Rulers”; Isabella was Queen of Castile and Ferdinand was King of Aragon. Whatever power Ferdinand exercised or title he held in Castile was given to him at his wife’s pleasure and lasted only as long as she wished. J. H. Elliott writes: “By the terms of [Isabella’s] will, Ferdinand, after thirty years as King of Castile, was to be stripped of his title on his wife’s death, and the Crown of Castile was to pass to their daughter, Juana, who was declared to be *Isabella’s* [my emphasis] successor as *señora natural propietaria*” (J. H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain* (Mentor: New York, 1966), p. 37). But when Netanyahu discusses “divine-right” theory in Castile, from Alfonso X in the late thirteenth century to Ferdinand at the end of the fifteenth century (1023 and ff.), he leaves a gaping hole; he ignores completely the fact that the hereditary ruler of Castile was *not* Ferdinand but Isabella, and she had her own ideas about monarchic absolutism. Any discussion of divine-right theory and practice in Castile must include the Castilian monarch: Isabella. But like virtually all other women of the time, she is unimportant to Netanyahu, and thus invisible in his book.

26. Selke, p. 151.

27. Selke, p. 22.

28. Selke, p. 25.

29. Selke, p. 80.

30. Selke, p. 81.

31. Father Juan Antonio Llorente (1756–1823) was a Secretary-General of the Inquisition in the 1790s and the first to see and publish large numbers of Inquisitorial records reaching back more than three centuries. See his prologue to his *Historia crítica de la Inquisición en España*, first published in French in 1817, with subsequent Spanish and English translations (Madrid: Hiperión, 1980), especially pp. 6–7, concerning the secrecy in which the records were maintained.

32. See Yerushalmi, pp. 21–24.

33. Silverman quotes the will of the widow of Solomon Shalom of Gerona, in what he calls her “visionary desire” that “Margarita, my *Christian* daughter, and my *Jewish* son and heir, Vidal de Piera, shall deal with one another in seemly fashion and shall live in peace and unity and love” (164–65). The emphasis and translation are Silverman’s; see his “Some Aspects of Literature and Life in the Golden Age of Spain,” in *Estudios de literatura española ofrecidos a Marcos A. Morínigo* (Madrid: Insula, 1971), pp. 133–70. This could not have been the only such case in pre-Expulsion Spain.

34. S. G. Armistead and J. H. Silverman, “El substrato cristiano del romancero sefardí,” in *En torno al romancero sefardí (Hispanismo y balcanismo de la tradición judeo-española)* (Madrid: Seminario Menéndez Pidal, 1982), pp. 127–48. They had already published a preliminary version in English, “Christian Elements and De-Christianization in the Sephardic *Romancero*,” in *Collected Studies in Honour of Américo Castro’s Eightieth Year*, edited by M. P. Hornik (Oxford: Lincombe Lodge Research Library, 1965), pp. 21–38. *Romancero* is literally a collection or book of ballads (*romances*); as it is used here it signifies the ballad tradition and its component songs (including all variants).

35. They quote here María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, “Una colección de romances judeo-españoles,” *Davar* 10 (1947): 5–26.

36. See Christopher R. Browning’s review essay, “Daniel Goldhagen’s Willing Executioners,” *History & Memory* Vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 1996): 88–108 (p. 97).

37. See Robert Gottfried, *The Black Death* (New York: Free Press, 1983). He estimates a 30% mortality rate for Aragon, Catalonia, Granada, and Portugal, and a 25% rate—still one out of every four people—in less densely populated Castile (52).

38. Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches’ Sabbath*, translated by Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Penguin, 1991).

The Uncanny Jew: A Brief History of an Image

S U S A N E. S H A P I R O

IN 1838, THE LEFT WING HEGELIAN THINKER, KARL Gutzkow, raised the image of the Jew and Judaism as it was shaped by the “Jewish Question”—that is, by the question of whether or not Jews should be politically emancipated and admitted as citizens to the modern nation-state.¹ He posed the question in the following dramatic terms:

Ahasverus [the eternal, wandering Jew] is the tragic consequence of Jewish hopes. There is embodied so painfully in this individual just that which the Jews wish collectively for themselves. There is in Judaism despair because though they would gladly die, they cannot. Certainly, the stubborn clinging to life by the Jews is a tragedy among their misfortunes. A messianic hope, which cannot be relinquished by even the most enlightened and purified Jews, tethers them to a bleak existence. . . .

For Judaism has never had the urge to self-destruction [Selbstvernichtung]. It has always been greedy to preserve and maintain itself for a triumphant future. Ahasverus’ tragic fate is not his violent and unsuccessful search for death, but rather his exhausted dusk-watch, his outliving of himself, his obsolescence. Time itself always remains young: new peoples arise, new heroes, new empires. Only Ahasverus stays on, a living corpse, a dead man who has not yet died.²

This image of the Jewish people as a “living corpse” is a representation that haunts the very formulation of the Jewish Question, not only—but especially—in Germany. Can the Jews as a people, as a nation, as a race, and/or as a religion be incorporated into the German nation-state? As indicated by the phrases that describe the Jews as an “Ahasverus,” a “dead man who has not yet died,” Gutzkow represents the tragedy of the Jews as the prolongation and obsolescence of their existence, not as their “search for death.” While a given thinker—such as Gutzkow, Hegel, or Schopenhauer—might support the civil emancipation of Jews, the consequences of this image—the trope of embodied living-death—for the political status of the Jews goes well beyond and, even, dialectically negates any argument for their emancipation. Any “solution” to the

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Jewish question, therefore, must not prolong their separate existence. They must be utterly incorporated into the nation-state.

In this essay, I trace some crucial moments in the modern history of this image and its consequences. These moments are taken not only from writings by non-Jews but from Jews who reconfigure and respond to this stereotype. The cultural, political, and social history of this image has had and perhaps continues to have significant consequences.³ The representation of Jews as Uncanny may have been shaped in and through the “logic” of the Jewish Question, but that image has a history which that question both inaugurated and could not contain. We must pay attention not only to the “logic” of arguments, of questions and answers, but to the figural terms that shape, and imaginatively locate, and make possible this very logic.

In order to sort out the implications of the impact of this image of the Jew as Uncanny—that is, as occupying an indistinguishable and undecidable borderline between life and death—I first discuss aspects of the Jewish Question in its German and French settings. I do so in order to demonstrate how its very cultural and political “logic” was produced by the representation of Jews as uncanny others. The contradictions of this logic further exacerbated the negative character of this image, producing ever more pernicious framings and “solutions.”

The contradictions of Jewish emancipation are very clearly and compactly set forth by Alain Finkielkraut in his book, *The Imaginary Jew*.⁴ Finkielkraut describes how, in response to their emancipation in France—and as the “Acts of the Israelitish Deputies” attest—“everything in [Jewish] law that might mark them as strangers to the human community was cast aside.”⁵ He notes that “[T]hey acquitted their debt by dejewifying themselves; the law, *their* law demanded they become mimics, for the advent of emancipation had placed them in France’s debt.”⁶

But what of the transgressors? The visible Jews, those who stood out? Who spoke French with a bad accent? Who were nostalgic for the ghetto and rejected integration? And the incorrigibles who persisted in acting as if a Jewish nation might still exist? By unilaterally violating the rules of emancipation, they encouraged anti-Jewish sentiment and placed the safety of their coreligionists at risk; traitors twice over, they were inadequate as citizens of France and as Jews. For the Israelites, acting Jewish in public could only be seen as a kind of dangerous sabotage. . . . The man of the past must be rooted out relentlessly: it’s a question of life and death. The hunt demands a continual state of alert, for not to pursue him in others is an indirect admission that he still lives within ourselves. . . . The same pattern holds for the Israelite: his regeneration and recovery cannot be regarded as finished until he devotes himself to an undying hatred of traditional Jews. . . . Judeophobia among the assimilated was all the more passionate; their social status was at stake, living as they did under the constant threat of being identified as Jews. . . . The only good Jew was an invisible Jew. The other, the visible Jew, was an obscene creature, indecent; morality as well as personal hygiene demanded that such an exhibitionist be shunned.⁷

But, ironically, it was precisely this effacement and hiddenness of Jewishness that was most threatening for emancipated European Jewish communities. Again, as Finkelkraut suggests,

Assimilation cannot be reduced to a *fiasco* pure and simple; it should perhaps be thought of as something more ironic, more diabolical yet: as a dreadful *misunderstanding*. Genocide [in W.W.II] was not imposed on the Jews *in spite of* their effort to assimilate, but *in response* to this very attempt. The more they hid their Jewishness, the more terrifying they became to others. As Jewish appearances gave less and less hint of ethnic background, the evils charged to Jews by anti-Semitic opinion grew worse and worse. Could these men of the Enlightenment ever have imagined that their increasing resemblance to the gentiles would arouse a hatred that ran so deep? . . . For the myth of Jewish omnipotence to take hold, the people of Zion first had to pass unnoticed, merge with the general populace. It took a Jew without qualities to fit the part of spy or conspirator. . . . Assimilation thus became a strange kind of trial in which the defendants completely misunderstood the indictment their judges had prepared. Assimilated Jews thought they were being charged with excessively Jewish behavior, when it was their will to integration that was really the crime: the wary would only weaken their case in the very way they secured their defense. A kind of relentless mechanism had been set in place, turning every protestation of innocence into yet more evidence of guilt.⁸

This pernicious logic is characteristic of the Jewish Question in Germany as well. As Paul Laurence Rose has noted, "For nineteenth-century Germans, so unsure of their own 'Germanness,' the Jewish Question was ultimately the German Question. It was, in effect, another way of asking 'What is German': and receiving the satisfying answer—'whatever is not Jewish.'"⁹ The success of the Jew in mimicking the German threatened the German's ability to define himself as, precisely, not a Jew—ironically making "jewification" (in a logic of contagion) both more pervasive and threatening because invisible, unlocatable, and, thus, uncontainable.

This contradiction at the heart of the Jewish question represents the two poles between which modern Jewish identity was stretched. Mimicry did not ultimately empower the Jew as subject but made the Jew who would be emancipated in the modern nation-state even more threatening and threatened.¹⁰ This no-win situation, I suggest, finds its figural condition and expression in the images and metaphors that shape the "Jewish Question." Jewish visibility—and invisibility—was perceived in terms of these stereotypes and images which pervaded the religious, philosophical, political, psychological, and aesthetic discourses of French and German modernity in particular. The "Jewish Uncanny," that is, the representation of the Jew, Jewishness, and Judaism as Uncanny, set the terms of the discourse.

The Jewish Uncanny in the terms articulated by Gutzkow represents the Jew(s) as spectral, disembodied spirits lacking a national home and, thus, as unwelcome guests and aliens wandering into and within other peoples' homes, disrupting and haunting them, making them "*Unheimliche*." Thus,

Moses Hess, for example, wrote of the Jews, as “a soul without a body, wandering like a ghost through the centuries.”¹¹ The image of the already dead, but uncannily still present, Jews was prevalent. Hegel, Heine, and Gans, as well as other members of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, drew upon it, and it had a major impact on Toynbee.

Among the solutions to the Jewish Question, some emphasized the disappearance of the Jews. Gutzkow writes further in these terms as follows:

The Jews wander and find only shelter among you. . . . [Yet] they have been long amongst us and strive to merge with us. Thus must now be exactly fulfilled the word of Christ that the Jews would wander in error for eternity and they should remain scattered over the whole earth. Pious Christians would fear that emancipation might deny this prophecy of Christ in an outrageous way. But in fact emancipation would for the first time directly split the Jews apart from one another, who until now have simply been scattered, and would fulfill the curse that was foreseen by Christ, namely that the Jews should cease for all eternity to be a people.¹²

Arthur Schopenhauer likewise sought the disappearance of the Jews. He suggested that the solution to the Jewish Question was conversion to Christianity and intermarriage. Note the pronounced resonances with the first passage from Gutzkow with which I opened this essay:

Ahasverus, the Wandering Jew, is nothing but the personification of the whole Jewish race. . . . This pettifogging little nation, this John Lackland among the nations, is to be found all over the globe, nowhere at home and nowhere strangers. . . . It asserts its Jewish nationality with unprecedented stubbornness . . . [but] lives parasitically on other nations. . . . To bring an end in the gentlest manner to the tragicomedy, the best way is for marriages . . . between Jews and gentiles. . . . Then, in the course of a hundred years, there will be only a very few Jews left, and soon the ghost will be exorcized. Ahasverus will be buried, and the chosen people will not know where their abode was. This desirable result, however, will be frustrated if the emancipation of the Jews is carried to the point of obtaining political rights. . . .¹³

While he opposed giving political rights to Jews, Schopenhauer did support the granting of civil rights to German Jews. One must be careful, however, not to assume that use of the same images of Jews necessitates identical positions on the Jewish Question. Ahasverus, the myth and representation of the Eternal or Wandering Jew, is a shared trope in both Gutzkow's and Schopenhauer's writings and their political stances are very close as well. But others who use this trope reverse its meaning and its political consequences. Even the negative connotations of the figure of Ahasverus, which came to the fore in a series of early seventeenth-century chapbooks, were not uniformly adopted.¹⁴

It is important to note that in all of the instances of Ahasverus cited in the context of the Jewish Question, it is specifically and always the male Jew's spectral *Unheimlichkeit* that is put to rest—for Schopenhauer through intermar-

riage, conversion, and assimilation, but not through political emancipation.¹⁵ The “positive” Christian reading of Ahasverus is that he is a sign of Christian faith in the second coming, at which point the Eternal Jew will finally find rest in his embracing of Jesus as Christ and his conversion to Christianity. Ahasverus, thus, is to be preserved as a part of, and a crucial witness to, the truth of Christianity. In its “negative” reading, Ahasverus becomes only the unloving and egoistic Jew who rejected Christ and was, therefore, cursed to wander ceaselessly and to find no rest, which was a sign of the Jew’s depravity and anti-sociality. This “negative” Ahasverus is decidedly outside of the bounds of Christianity, the religion of love. Eliminating Ahasverus becomes, in this version, part of the triumph and fulfillment of this love.¹⁶ The significance of the myth and image of Ahasverus, I suggest, is not only that it was in these writings negatively inflected, but that it was a way of representing the *Unheimlichkeit* of the Jews as an ancient problem—as a problem of the Jews’ essential character, be that essence understood to derive from their national, religious, racial, or psychological character.

The solution to the Jewish Question for other thinkers was precisely to heighten their profile as Jews in their own nation-state. Proposing a radically different position on emancipation than either Gutzkow or Schopenhauer, the Zionist, Leo Pinsker, employed a remarkably similar figure to describe the condition of the Jews:

The world saw in this people [the Jews] the uncanny [*Unheimliche*] form of one of the dead walking among the living. The ghostlike apparition of a living corpse, of a people without unity or organization, without land or other bonds of unity, no longer alive, and yet walking among the living—this spectral form without precedence in history, unlike anything that preceded or followed it, could but strangely affect the imagination of the nations. And if the fear of ghosts is something inborn, and has a certain justification in the psychic life of mankind, why be surprised at the effect produced by this dead but still living nation? . . . A fear of the Jewish ghost has passed down the generations and the centuries. First a breeder of prejudice, later in conjunction with other forces . . . it culminated in Judeophobia. . . . Judeophobia is a variety of demonopathy with the distinction that it is not peculiar to particular races but is common to the whole of mankind, and that this ghost is not disembodied like other ghosts but partakes of flesh and blood, must endure pain inflicted by the fearful mob who imagines itself endangered. . . . It is this fear of ghosts, the mother of Judeophobia, that has evoked this abstract, I might say Platonic hatred, thanks to which the whole Jewish nation is wont to be held responsible for the real or supposed misdeeds of its individual members, and to be libeled in so many ways, to be buffeted about so shamefully.¹⁷

In employing the figure of the *Unheimliche* Jew, Pinsker, the medical doctor, diagnosed his as a diseased, but curable, condition—the result of the incurable pathology of European Judeophobia. Writing just prior to the turn of the century, Pinsker, a Russian, wrote this manifesto in German: In the wake of the failure of the emancipation bestowed on them in Europe and its

increasing anti-Semitism, he called for the auto-emancipation of the Jews. The building of a national home would, finally, put an end to their spectral, haunting diasporic status. Pinsker concludes his argument as follows:

The Jews are not a living nation; they are everywhere aliens; therefore they are despised.

The civil and political emancipation of the Jews is not sufficient to raise them in the estimation of the peoples.

The proper, the only solution, is in the creation of a Jewish nationality, of a people living upon its own soil, the auto-emancipation of the Jews; their return to the ranks of the nations by the acquisition of a Jewish homeland. . . .

That we may not be compelled to wander from one exile to another, we must have an extensive, productive land of refuge, a center which is our own. . . .

The international Jewish question must have a national solution.¹⁸

Ahad Ha'Am, writing in 1902, some 20 years after Pinsker, drew out some of the implications of Pinsker's views in ways that seem prescient. They echo the analysis of the contradictions of assimilation found in the writings of Finkelkraut and Rose. Ahad Ha' Am asks:

Assimilate with the nations? If real assimilation be meant—the assimilation that reaches to the very soul and ends in annihilation—that is a kind of death which does not come of itself, and we do not wish to bring it on by our own efforts. But the surface assimilation which is the panacea advocated by a certain section of Jews can only make matters worse for us. Pinsker himself does not draw this conclusion in so many words; but it is a necessary consequence of the idea just mentioned. For, seeing that the source of anti-Semitism lies in our lack of a concrete national existence, which would compel the other nations to recognize in us a nation equal to themselves in status, it follows plainly that the more we assimilate—the more we imitate our surroundings and whittle away our national distinctiveness—the less concrete and the more spiritual will our national existence become; and the more, therefore, will the ghost-fear which begets anti-Semitism grow in intensity. . . . It is . . . fundamental to Pinsker's view that national equality is unattainable so long as we lack the concrete attributes of nationality. A nation which is a nation only in the spiritual sense is a monstrosity which the other nations cannot possibly regard as their compeer; it follows that they cannot recognize its title to demand the same rights as those enjoyed by the real nations.¹⁹

Other Jewish writers, including Eduard Gans, a founder of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Moses Hess, the author of *Rome and Jerusalem*, and the poet Heinrich Heine, employed this image of the Uncanny Jew. Gans called for the Jews to be “completely incorporate[d] into [the fabric of Europe],”²⁰ while Hess argued for resurrecting or regenerating the body of the Jews by planting its seed again within its home soil. Hess, who is often considered the first modern Zionist, elicits the regeneration of the Jews in their national homeland by way of two very striking images. In the first image, “the soldiers of civilization, the French, are gradually sweeping away the dominance of the barbarians; and with their strong Herculean arms will roll off the tombstones from the graves

of the supposedly dead peoples and the nations will reawaken once more.”²¹ In the other image, Hess declared that, “The Jewish nation still preserves the fruitful seed of life, which, like the grains of corn found in the graves of Egyptian mummies, though buried for thousands of years, have never lost their power of productivity. The moment the rigid form in which it is enclosed is shattered, the seed, placed in the fertile soil of the present environment and given air and light, will strike root and prosper.”²²

For Hess, this rigid form or husk that needs to be broken is the assimilationist desire to become German of the classical Jewish Reformists who, thereby, seek to render themselves invisible as Jews. He was concerned as well with the rigidity of the Orthodox. But whereas he thought the rigid husk around the reformists had to be broken from the outside in the final, great cultural calamity in which they would disappear, the Orthodox husk had to be preserved to protect the nationalist seed within until such time as the Jews could one again sow their land and return to life from the grave.

The grains of corn in Hess’s second image, buried in Egyptian graves for thousands of years, like the seed that is again planted within its home soil in the first image, “have never lost their power of productivity.” Egyptian mummies and graves signify absolute death and stasis. They also signified, for Hegel, entombment and belief in immortality. Hegel thought that the Jews did not believe in immortality and that they, thus, failed to undertake—and were incapable of understanding the significance of—mummification. In locating the Jewish “grains of corn” in the *graves* of Egyptian mummies—but not as the mummies themselves—Hess thereby makes his thought more compatible with that of Hegel, whose thought Hess admired. Jews may have sojourned in Egypt but, for both Hess and Hegel, they are not Egyptian.

The “emphasis on the Egyptian origins of Judaism [in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries] suggested to many that the uncanny persistence of the Jewish corpse after the death of Judaism might be attributable to a process of mummification.”²³ For Heinrich Heine Jews are sometimes figured as embalmed: “Oh, those Egyptians—their handiwork defies time, their pyramids still stand immovable; their mummies are indestructible as ever. And just as indestructible is the mummy-nation that wanders over the face of the earth, wrapped in its age-old scroll of the law; a petrified piece of world-history—a specter, which for a livelihood trafficks in bills of exchange and old clothes.”²⁴ But Heine (and in this he is more like Hess) also employs more positive images of the uncanniness of Jews and Judaism: “The Jews are a ghost who keeps guard over a treasure which was once entrusted to him. Thus sat this murdered people, this ghost-people, in its dark ghetto, and guarded there its Hebrew Bible.”²⁵ In both images, the Jews are closely connected to their texts: the “age-old scroll of the law,” which is connected to death and mummification, and the “Hebrew Bible,” which it guards as a treasure with its life. This is a typical *Wissenschaft des Judentums* view of the Jews as well as of the respective value of these texts.

These are but a very few examples of the image and trope of the “Jewish Uncanny,” in which the Jew is on the border between life and death, life in death, death in life. But which one is it? Embedded in this image is this very ambiguity and undecidability.

It is as this border-state, this spectral and ghost-like condition, that I think the trope of the “Jewish Uncanny” is both repressed and returns in Freud’s writings, especially in his 1919 essay, “*das Unheimliche*” (“The Uncanny”).²⁶ This may seem an odd suggestion to make since Freud does not explicitly link the Jews and the Uncanny in this essay. Freud draws the reader’s attention to the figure of the Sandman, in E. T. A Hoffman’s tale of that name, and to the Oedipus complex, and away from the figure of Olympia, the automaton, and his seeming confusion of her with a living young woman. He emphasizes that the Uncanny focuses on that which “ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light.”²⁷ While scholars have drawn connections dawn between castration and circumcision in Freud’s corpus that trouble the association of the Uncanny and the Jew,²⁸ this phallic reading takes account only of the Oedipal themes of Freud’s “*das Unheimliche*.” I agree with Hélène Cixous when she suggests that we, the readers, have had “sand thrown in our eyes,”²⁹ and that the exclusively Oedipal interpretation fails to contain the many different examples which proliferate throughout Freud’s essay.³⁰ What we have is an uncannily hybrid and heterological text; a close reading unravels Freud’s attempt to master the Uncanny in terms of the Oedipal complex. Instead of the predominance of the paternal, it is the maternal I suggest that haunts Freud’s essay; and it is the death instinct—rather than the more restricted Oedipal economy—that dominates “*das Unheimliche*.”³¹

Freud explicitly directs our attention away from the uncanniness of the borderline between the living and the dead. I think that it is precisely this trope of the Uncanny Jew that Freud is both displacing and attempting to re-envision. Writing during World War I, Freud attempts to embed the Jew (and Jewishness) within a universalized male subject. Ameliorating (or exorcising) the Jewish problem by reading the uncanniness of the Jew into the very structures of the unconscious within everyman, Freud’s Uncanny may thereby be seen as generated by the German *Heim* itself (as both family and nation-state) and not by a stranger, an Ahasverus wandering into and within the *Heim* from the outside. Especially after W.W.I, “unheimliche” others might thereby be reincorporated into the [national] *Heim*, the *Heimat*. Specifically, the Jew as the Uncanny other, the haunting ghost, might be put to rest by universalizing the site and origins of the “Unheimlich” *within* (and not as split off from, or as outside of) the *Heim*.

Freud’s use of the trope of the Uncanny, thus, offers a third response to the “Jewish Question”—not Schopenhauer’s conversion and intermarriage of Jews as a way of accomplishing their disappearance, nor Pinsker’s or Hess’ Zionism in which the Jews become ever more visible by either emancipating themselves or by awaiting national redemption at the hands of Europe, and

France in particular. Freud turns the trope of the Uncanny from the Jew to everyman, returning the specter to its familial origin in the mother's body, her "womb," the first home. The Uncanny is, thereby, displaced from the Jewish male and grafted onto the body of woman, especially as mother. The primary anxiety which produces this sense of "unheimlichkeit" is located in this way not in racial terms, but explicitly in sexual difference. If, as has been argued,³² the Jew's body was in the *fin-de-siècle* negatively feminized and, thereby, made other than everyman, this feminine difference was in "das Unheimliche" displaced and reinscribed onto women's bodies. In this way, Freud reinstituted the male Jews' masculinity, making him capable of the *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit* necessary for full emancipation. And if, as I have suggested, Freud is performing such a covert reincorporation of the Jew within the (national) home, he would hardly flag such a performance. I cannot here more fully make this case, but part of its persuasiveness depends on reading Freud's essay in the context of previous images of the Uncanny Jew, as well as those in terms of the works of contemporaries, such as Franz Rosenzweig, which were written as well (even if only in part) during W.W.I.

The Uncanny, the *Unheimliche*, has consistently been associated with the feminine, with passivity, and lack. For Pinsker, it is "the fear of ghosts" that is "the mother of Judeophobia."³³ And, of course, Freud treats the Uncanny as a form of homesickness or nostalgia, of the desire to "return home" to the mother's womb. Both Freud and, especially, Pinsker found the Uncanny unsettling and each in his own way sought to put the *Unheimlichkeit* of the Jews to rest. Pinsker sought to create a national home for the Jewish people which had "no fatherland of its own, though many motherlands; no center of focus or gravity, no government of its own, no official representation."³⁴ The Jew, he goes on to say, makes homes "everywhere, but [is] nowhere at home. . . . [N]ot only is he not a native in his own home country, but he is also not a foreigner; he is, in very truth, the stranger *par excellence*. He is regarded as neither friend nor foe but an alien, of whom the only thing known is that he has no home."³⁵ For Pinsker, once the ghost is put to rest in the founding of a national Jewish home, the Uncanny disappears. For him, "Home" (*Heim*) and the "Uncanny" (*Unheimliche*) are opposing terms.

This is not the case for Freud. He puts to rest the Ahasverus myth, in which the Jew wanders into the homes of others from the outside, by locating the origin of the Unheimlich within the home itself. Even the very term "*Unheimlich*" is understood by Freud to derive from its apparent opposite, that is, "*Heimlich*." As he says, "*Heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *Unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *Heimlich*."³⁶ That which is secret, *geheim*, and is considered part of the privacy of the home, the *heimlich*, develops as "something hidden and dangerous" into the uncanny, the *unheimlich*. Freud interprets "Schelling's definitions of the uncanny as something that ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to

light”³⁷ as the result of the repression of the familiar, of that which originates from within the home, the feminine, the *heimliche*. Freud, unlike Pinsker, does not eliminate the Uncanny, but relocates it.

For Rosenzweig, as for Pinsker and Freud, the Uncanny is associated with the feminine, passivity, and lack. And yet, Rosenzweig differs significantly from them in his treatment of the Uncanniness of the Jews. Unlike both of these thinkers, Rosenzweig *emphasizes* the *Unheimlichkeit* of the Jews. As a Holy people, they are Uncanny to the nations. This Uncanniness is part of their very witness. The Jewish Question, for Rosenzweig, is formed and answered very differently than for Pinsker. The Jews, according to Rosenzweig, are *not* a people like other peoples. Jewish roots are genealogical, within the familial line, not within the soil. The Jews are not a land-oriented people. Even the Holy land is not theirs, but God’s, the Holy One.

To the eternal people, home never is home in the sense of land, as it is to the peoples of the world who plough the land and live and thrive on it, until they have all but forgotten that being a people means something besides being rooted in a land. The eternal people has not been permitted to while away time in any home. It never loses the untrammelled freedom of a wanderer. . . . And so even when it has a home, this people, in recurrent contrast to all other peoples on earth, is not allowed full possession of that home. It is only ‘a stranger and a sojourner.’ . . . The holiness of the land removed it from the people’s spontaneous reach while it could still reach out for it. This holiness increases the longing for what is lost, to infinity, and so the people can never be entirely at home in any other land.³⁸

Not a Zionist like Pinsker or Ahad Ha’Am, Rosenzweig sees the Jews as an eternal people precisely because of their uncanniness, living “beyond [the] external life” of the nations,

barred from [its] own soil and [its] own language. . . . The eternal people buys its eternity at the cost of its temporal life. . . . For this people, the moment petrifies and stands between unincreased past and immovable future. . . . While the myth of peoples changes incessantly . . . here the myth becomes eternal and is not subject to change. . . . And so . . . we see . . . in the relation to its own history, what we saw before in its relation to language and land, that this people is denied a life in time for the sake of life in eternity. It cannot experience the history of the nations creatively and fully. Its position is always somewhere between the temporal and the holy, always separated from the one by the other. And so, in the final analysis, it is not alive in the sense the nations are alive: in a national life manifest on this earth, in a national territory, solidly based and staked out on the soil. It is alive only in that which guarantees it will endure beyond time, in that which pledges it everlastingness.³⁹

As these passages from the *Star of Redemption* demonstrate, Rosenzweig incorporates the *Unheimlichkeit* of the Jews into his view of their role and purpose. As the eternal people, the Jews are God’s portion. It is this, and not the Christian explanation of the punishment of Ahasverus—the Wandering or

Eternal Jew—for rejecting Christ, that accounts for their Uncanniness. What is viewed by the nations as central—especially the possession of their own land, everyday language, and national history—is not valued in the same way for Jews. From the perspective of eternity the lives of the nations appear vain and transient. The real home of the Jews is in the Holy, in eternity. All other homes, even that of the holy land, are not fully their own and their inhabiting of these lands can only be partial. And as with the land, so too with language. As Rosenzweig says, “The holiness of the holy language which the Jew employs only for prayer does not permit his life to put out roots into the soil of a language of its own. So far as his language is concerned, the Jew feels always he is in a foreign land, and knows that the home of his language is in the region of the holy language, a region everyday speech can never invade.”⁴⁰

Neither Pinsker nor Freud would be satisfied with this revaluation of the Jewish Uncanny. For Rosenzweig preserves just that separateness and otherness of the Jews that they would have erased, Pinsker by normalizing the people as a nation with its own land, and Freud by dissolving the racially marked difference of the Jews in terms of a more primary and constitutive notion of sexual difference. Rosenzweig interprets home and *heimlichkeit* in terms of the Holy and eternity, thereby making the Jews inescapably and purposely *Unheimlich*. In this way, he appears to confirm anti-Semitic views of Jews as negatively uncanny, as defined by lack, as *not* having a national land, language, and history. At the same time, Rosenzweig affirms a different sense of the *Unheimlichkeit* of the Jews, transvaluing it in terms of the difference between the value of the order of temporality and that of the eternal. One understanding of the Uncanny is, at it were, the uncanny mirror image of the other.

How does one decide between them? Which image casts the light from which the other gains its reflection, or are both reflections of equal status and truth? Are the Jews a petrified or an eternal people? In a way, Rosenzweig might claim that the Jews are both petrified and eternal, but that only the Jews can understand, through the witness of their lives, their own eternity. There is an impassable chasm between the view of non-Jews and of Jews on this matter. This is why for Rosenzweig the Jews suffer in history, even in the modern nation-state, as they fulfill their witness of pointing to the not-yet character of redemption. Anti-Semitism would, thus, seem unavoidable. And thus we must ask Rosenzweig a, perhaps, undecidable question: in the messianic time will anti-Semitism’s negative Uncanny finally be understood in light of the Holy, and the eternity of the Jews? Or will Jews, having fulfilled their mission, disappear? What are we, then, to make of this complementarity between Jewishness, Judaism, and its supplement or Uncanny double, anti-Semitism? Pinsker seems to have thought that, at least before the making of a national home for the Jews, these two would necessarily coexist: “In this way have Judaism and anti-Semitism passed for centuries through history as inseparable companions. Like the Jewish people, the real wandering Jew, anti-Semitism,

too seems as if it would never die. He must be blind indeed who will assert that the Jews are not *the chosen people*, the people chosen for universal hatred.”⁴¹

Since its formative development with the advent of the Jewish Question in the emancipation, to its so called, “Final Solution” in the terrible literalizing of this image in the manufacture in the Shoah of the “living-dead,” the image of the Uncanny Jew has, as it were, had a powerful afterlife. The trope of the Jewish Uncanny and images of Jews as uncanny are evident in explicitly post-Holocaust fiction and memoirs⁴² as well as in contemporary novels about Jewish identity.⁴³ But it has perhaps been most prevalent and influential in its appearance in contemporary French critical theory, from the writings of Maurice Blanchot and Jean-François Lyotard to those of Jacques Derrida, Edmond Jabès, and Emmanuel Levinas.⁴⁴ Most of these writers treat the figure of Jewish wandering, exile, and nomadism, a number of them doubling this figure with that of the writer. But what I want to focus on here is how Judaism, Jewishness, and anti-Semitism are treated as intertwined topics in some of these texts. For the questions I raised in relation to Rosenzweig’s views of the Uncanniness of the Jews, and Pinsker’s pointing to Judaism and anti-Semitism as “inseparable companions” remain and must be further addressed, if not resolved.

In *The Infinite Conversation*, Blanchot writes,

Anti-Semitism, in this sense, is in no way accidental; it gives a figure to the repulsion inspired by the Other, the uneasiness before what comes from afar and elsewhere: the need to kill the Other, that is, to submit to the all powerfulness of death what cannot be measured in terms of power. One could perhaps say that anti-Semitism has three characteristics: (1) it turns all the “positive” values of Judaism into negatives and, first of all, the primary affirmation of the distance that is “infinite,” irreducible, impassible (even when it is passed over), with which Judaism confronts us; (2) it transforms into fault (into an ethically and socially condemnable reality) this being-negative to which it reduces the Jew; (3) it does not restrict itself to a theoretical judgment, but calls for the actual suppression of the Jews in order better to exercise against them the principle of denial with which it has invested their image. A denial so absolute, it is true, that it does not cease to *reaffirm* the relation with the infinite that being-Jewish implies. . . . The anti-Semite, at grips with the infinite, thus commits himself to a limitless movement of refusal. No, truly, excluding the Jews is not enough, exterminating them is not enough; they must also be struck from history, removed from the books through which they speak to us, just as the presence that inscribed speech must finally be obliterated: the speech before and after every book and through which, from the farthest distance where all horizon is lacking, man has already turned toward man—in a word, destroy “autrui.”⁴⁵

A number of questions haunt this text, only some of which I will raise in conclusion. Can the two questions of Judaism and anti-Semitism be separated or are they, as Blanchot suggests, rather one—not only political, but metaphysical—Jewish Question?

I observe . . . that anti-Semites, too, seek fundamentally only to avoid the metaphysical exigency that Judaism poses to each of us by way of Jewish existence, and that is in order better to suppress this question that they want to suppress all Jews. . . . To neglect this aspect of anti-Semitism is to renounce coming to grips with its gravity, to renounce finding it in one of its roots, and therefore to refuse to see what is at stake when, in the world, in whatever form it may take, anti-Semitism affirms and strengthens itself.⁴⁶

Is this a “universal problem,” or can Judaism and/or Jewishness separate itself from the metaphysics of Europe and its anti-Semitism? But is this not precisely the question at stake: the relation of Judaism, Jewishness, and the West? Can and must they be thought of separately or are they always together? What if we *cannot* separate these questions? Would, then, the discourse of anti-Semitism define Jewishness (in, for example, contemporary critical theory) the way for Jean-Paul Sartre the anti-Semite’s gaze fixes and defines the Jew?⁴⁷

Whether these discourses in principle can be separated or not, many thinkers have taken up, turned, and transformed anti-Semitic images such as the Jewish Uncanny as part of their representation of Judaism and Jewishness. What are the responsibilities of these Jewish and non-Jewish writers, and what are the consequences of the images they employ? Some seem to treat these metaphors, images, and tropes with an, as it were, unbearable lightness. How, then, to account for their gravity? Can the instability and volatility of these images constituting the “Jewish Uncanny” be directed and contained? Or do the images have a power that rules and persists beyond and despite authorial intent? Whatever the response to these questions, it seems clear, however, that once having been raised in these terms and images, the “Jewish Question” cannot easily or simply be put to rest, but continues to haunt our discourses of self, of other, of nation, of religion, of identity, and identification.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank the Yad Ha-Nadiv Beracha Foundation, and especially Professor Paul Mendes-Flohr, for supporting some of the early stages of the research for this essay at the Hebrew University during 1992–1993. I presented an earlier version of this essay at the December 1995 Modern Language Association Annual Meeting in the “Jewish Cultural Studies” section under the title “Troping Jews.” I thank Professor Menachim Schmeltzer for inviting me to deliver the present version of this essay as the Francis Thau Memorial Lecture at the Jewish Theological Seminary on October 17, 1996.

2. Karl Gutzkow, “Plan for an Ahasverus” (August 1838) reprinted in his *Vermischte Schriften* (1842), pp. 164–166, as translated by and cited in Paul Lawrence Rose, *German Question/Jewish Question: Revolutionary Anti-Semitism from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 199.

3. For a more extended discussion of the role of figures and tropes in argument and their consequences, see my “A Matter of Discipline: Reading for Gender in Jewish Philosophy,” in *Judaism Since Gender*, edited by Miriam Peskowitz and Laura Levitt (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 158–173.

4. Alain Finkielkraut, *The Imaginary Jew*, translated by David Suchoff and Kevin O'Neill (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994). Originally published as *Le Juif imaginaire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980), reprinted in Collection "Points," No. 149, 1983.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 63–66.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.
9. Rose, *German Question/ Jewish Question*, p. 41.
10. For a more extensive discussion of the politics of mimicry and the Jewish Question, see my "Écriture judaïque: Where are the Jews in Western Discourse?" in Angelika Bammer, *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 182–201.
11. Cited in Moses Hess, *The Revival of Israel: Rome and Jerusalem, the Last Nationalist Question*, translated by Meyer Waxman, "Introduction," Melvin I. Urofsky (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. vi. [Originally published in German in 1862. Translated into English by Meyer Waxman in 1918 and published under the title *Rome and Jerusalem: A Study of Jewish Nationalism* (New York: Bloch Pub. Co.), reprinted in 1943.]
12. Karl Gutzkow, *Die Zeitgenossen* (Stuttgart 1837), pp. 233–235, as translated in and cited by Rose, *German Question/ Jewish Question*, p. 193.
13. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 2:261–264.
14. For a discussion of this turning point, see George K. Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew* (Hanover: Brown University Press, 1965, 1991), p. 51.
15. Because it is always the male Jew's Unheimlichkeit at stake in the Jewish Question, I have employed male pronouns to refer to the Jew, even when he is feminized, throughout this essay. I am not addressing the "Jewess Question" here. See Amy-Jill Levine, "A Jewess, More and/or Less" and Jay Geller, "Circumcision and Jewish Women's Identity," in *Judaism Since Gender*, edited by Peskowitz and Levitt, pp. 149–157 and pp. 174–187.
16. On the Wandering Jew, see Galit Hasan-Roken and Alan Dundes, eds., *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), George K. Anderson, and Rose.
17. Leo Pinsker, "Auto-Emancipation: An Appeal to his People by a Russian Jew," in *Modern Jewish History: A Source Reader*, edited by Robert Chazan and Marc Lee Raphael (New York: Schocken Press, 1969), pp. 163–164.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
19. Ahad Ha'Am, "Pinsker and Political Zionism," in *Ahad Ha'Am: Essays, Letters, Memoirs*, translated by Leon Simon (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1946), pp. 186–187.
20. Eduard Gans, "A Society to Further Jewish Integration (1822)," in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 216. Gans was one of the seven founding members of the Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews, founded in 1819. He claimed that "To merge does not mean to perish [*aufgehen ist nicht untergehen*], . . . that everything passes without perishing, and yet persists, although it has long been consigned to the past. That is why neither the Jews will perish nor Judaism dissolve; in the larger movement of the whole they will seem to have disappeared, and yet they will live on as the river lives in the ocean . . . : 'There will be a time when no one in Europe will ask any longer, who is a Jew and who is a Christian?' [Herder]," pp. 216–217.
21. Hess, *The Revival of Israel*, p. 76.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
23. Newman, p. 161.
24. Heinrich Heine, "Travel Sketches: The City of Lucca," chapter 13, p. 601, as cited in Amy Newman, "The Death of Judaism in German Protestant Thought from Luther to Hegel," *Journal*

of the *American Academy of Religion* LXI/3: 466–467. Rose cites this passage, as found in his *German Question/Jewish Question*, p. 161, as follows: “A mummified people [*Volksmumie*] that wanders the earth, wrapped up in its swathing of prescriptive letters, an obstinate piece of world history, a specter that bargains for its maintenance with bills of exchange and old hose.” Rose also describes Ludwig Borne as having a view similar to that expressed by Heine: “Borne Indeed disliked very much what he saw as the narrow religiosity and tribalism of the Jews, what he called this dead ‘Egyptian mummy.’” (Rose, p. 143; Ludwig Borne, *Aphorismen* No. 164.)

25. Heinrich Heine, *History of Religion and Philosophy*, Introduction, p. vii, as cited in Rose, *German Question/Jewish Question*, p. 165.

26. Sigmund Freud, “das Unheimliche,” originally published in *Imago* Vol. 5/6 (1919): 297–324; English translation by Alix Strachey, “The Uncanny,” *Studies in Parapsychology* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 19–60.

27. Freud, “The Uncanny,” p. 28.

28. Daniel Boyarin, “What Does a Jew Want?; or, The Political Meaning of the Phallus,” *Discourses* (1996–1997 Fall-Winter), special issue on race and psychoanalysis, ed. Christopher Lane (forthcoming); Jay Geller, “A Paleontological View of Freud’s Study of Religion: Unearthing the *Leitfossil* Circumcision,” *Modern Judaism* 13 (1993): 49–70; Sander Gilman, “The Construction of the Male Jew,” *Freud, Race, and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 49–92.

29. Hélène Cixous, “Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud’s *Das Unheimliche* (The ‘Uncanny’),” *New Literary History* (Spring 1976): 525–548; English translation of the French, originally published in *Poétique* (1972): 199–216.

30. Samuel Weber, “The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment,” *Modern Language Notes* (1973): 1102–1133.

31. Sara Kofman, “The Double is/and the Devil: The Uncanniness of *The Sandman* (*Der Sandmann*),” *Freud and Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 121–162, first published as “Le Double e(s)t le diable,” in *Quatre romans analytiques* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1974), pp. 135–181.

32. Sander Gilman, “The Jewish Psyche: Freud, Dora, and the Idea of the Hysteric,” *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 60–103; Jay Geller, “The Unmanning of the Wandering Jew,” *American Imago* Vol. 49, No. 2 (1992): 227–262; Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997 forthcoming).

33. Pinsker, p. 164.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

36. Freud, “The Uncanny,” p. 30.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

38. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, translated by William W. Hallo (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 300. *Der Stern der Erlösung* was originally published in 1921.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 302–304.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

41. Pinsker, p. 164.

42. D. M. Thomas, *The White Hotel* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981); W. G. Sebald, *The Emigrants*, translated by Michael Hulse (New York: New Directions Pub. Co., 1996), originally published as *Die Ausgewanderten* (Frankfurt: Eichborn Verlag, 1993).

43. Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

44. For more on the figuration of Jews in contemporary French critical theory, especially that of Jean-François Lyotard, see my “*Écriture judaïque*.” For a general discussion of the representation of Jews and Jewishness in French postmodern discourse, see Michael Weingrad, “Jews (in Theory): Representations of Judaism, Anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust in Postmodern French Thought,” *Judaism* Vol. 45, No. 1 (Winter 1996): 79–98.

45. Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, translated by Susan Hanson (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 129–130; Originally published as *L'Entretien infini* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1969).

46. Ibid., p. 447, footnote 4.

47. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, translated by George J. Becker (New York: Grove Press, 1960). Originally published as *Réflexions sur la question juive* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954). See Susan Rubin Suleiman, "The Jew in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Réflexions sur la question juive*: An exercise in Historical Reading," in *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, edited by Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1995), pp. 201–218.

Errata

In "From Tenement to Theater: Jewish Women as Dance Pioneers," by Joanna Gewertz Harris (Summer 1996), the photo of Anna Sokolow comes to us courtesy of Larry Warren (p. 271). Note 3 (p. 275) should read: Larry Warren, *Anna Sokolow: The Rebellious Spirit* (Princeton, NJ: Dance Horizon, 1991), p. 16.

Nature's Healing Power, the Holocaust, and the Environmental Crisis

ERIC KATZ

TWO RECENT ARTICLES IN THIS JOURNAL HAVE RAISED fundamental questions about the relationship of Jewish thought to the world of Nature. In "Nature vs. Torah" by Jeremy Benstein, and "Judaism and Nature" by Eilon Schwartz, the authors go well beyond the usual tactic of showing that Jewish law and tradition support environmentalist views.¹ Rather than merely "presenting Judaism's environmental credentials,"² or searching traditional sources for passages that support environmental positions,³ each writer grapples with difficult texts and problematic traditions in the Jewish relationship with Nature. Is Judaism a belief system that is fundamentally transcendent, placing supreme value on a spiritual world totally separate from the material realm of Nature? Or is the natural world, as part of divine creation, sacred? Is the study of Torah so important that a study of the natural world must be avoided? Can we develop an appropriate response to the environmental crisis without returning to a form of paganism? Can we discover an authentic *Jewish* response to the natural environment? As Benstein notes, there is no *one* Jewish tradition concerning Nature, environmentalist or otherwise: "Part of the richness of Judaism . . . is the ongoing dialogue between the frequently very disparate voices of that tradition."⁴

As a secular environmental philosopher who has had some experience with Jewish texts concerning environmental policy,⁵ I request permission to enter into this debate. I begin from an unusual and perhaps idiosyncratic starting point. For almost twenty years I have worked in the realm of academic philosophy on questions concerning the moral status of the nonhuman natural world, questions that can be applied to the ethical foundations of environmental policy. More recently, I have become interested in the philosophy of the Holocaust. Does my work as an environmental philosopher have any relevance to an understanding of the evil of human genocide? Can the study of genocide teach us anything about the human-induced destruction of the natural world, what is sometimes called the process of "ecocide"? Schwartz, for example, discusses the dangers of paganism by tying it to Nazi ideology.⁶ I

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believe that there are connections between the massive destruction of the earth's biosphere and the planned extermination of European Jewry. In my view, genocide and ecocide may be linked together by an analysis of the concept of domination. A comparative study of these two evils may point us in the direction of developing a harmonious relationship with both the natural world and our fellow human beings.

This essay is also the result of a visit to several Holocaust sites in Poland and the Czech Republic in October 1995. It is both more and less than a philosophical argument. I could not have developed these ideas through the philosophical method of argument and analysis. The lived experience of these places not only colors my thoughts but to some extent informs them. The essay is my attempt to come to terms with the physical experience of these places, and to place these experiences into the context of philosophical ideas about the meaning of the environmental crisis, the practice of human domination, and the significance of Jewish life in the modern world. It is my hope that these reflections will contribute to the development of a Jewish philosophy of nature appropriate to the environmental crisis which surrounds us.

1. Places

The trees are like a forest. Although I can hear the sounds of traffic on Okopowa Street on the other side of the wall, inside the Jewish Cemetery of Warsaw all is quiet. Light rain and fog, mist and shadows, the grayness of this day, prevent my eyes from seeing deep into the cemetery. There are trees and underbrush, lush and green, growing up and over the scattered and crooked grave stones. One main walkway and a few paths have been cleared, so that tourists can view several hundred of the tombstones. Another path leads to a clearing not of trees, but tombstones. This is the mass grave of the Jews who died in the Warsaw Ghetto before the deportations to Treblinka began in July 1942. The mass grave appears as a meadow under a canopy of tree branches. The area is ringed by grave stones, but the center of the clearing is covered with grass. Dozens of *yahrzeit* candles flicker, remaining lit despite the dampness and the light rain. The beauty of this mass grave surprises and shocks me. Here is the reification of irony. This cemetery, a monument to the destructive hatred of the Nazi holocaust, is extraordinarily beautiful. Filled with a vibrant, unchecked growth of trees and other vegetation, the cemetery demonstrates the power of Nature to reassert itself in the midst of human destruction and human evil.

The next day I travel to Lublin, near the Ukrainian border—a two-hour drive from Warsaw, through endless flat farmland where Polish farmers still use horses to plow the fields. It is harvest season, and the car slows occasionally to pass a truck filled with sugar beets. Our destination is Majdanek, the death camp lying three kilometers from the center of Lublin. Majdanek fills a treeless meadow stretching as far as the eye can see. Standing at the entrance gate one can see in the distance, a mile off, the chimney of the crematorium.

Unlike Treblinka or Auschwitz-Birkenau, the camp at Majdanek was built near a major urban center that would supply its victims. It was not hidden in the countryside. It is easy to imagine the smoke from the crematorium drifting into the heart of downtown Lublin. Majdanek was first established as a slave labor camp in 1940, but its gas chambers began operating in November 1942. In one day alone, November 3, 1943, 18,000 prisoners were killed by shooting, the bodies piled high in open ditches near the crematorium. Over 800,000 shoes were found at Majdanek when it was liberated in July 1944 by the advancing Russian army. This was the first of the camps to be liberated, the first to be seen by the Allied forces and the Western media. Unlike the camps further west, Majdanek was not destroyed by the retreating German forces. Although many of the wooden barracks have deteriorated through natural decay, the camp as a whole remains relatively intact today as it did in 1944.⁷

I stand in the small open courtyard a few dozen yards beyond the entrance gate. On this spot the selections of arriving prisoners were made—who would live and work in the camp, who would be killed immediately. To my right is the gas chamber. On my left is a row of barracks, used as storerooms and work areas when the camp was in operation. These unheated and dimly lit barracks now house museum exhibits. Beyond the first row of barracks is the main camp, divided into several sections. Each section consists of two rows of barracks facing a wide open parade ground. I enter the gate and walk through the parade ground and on to the road leading to the crematorium and the site of the November 1943 mass shooting. The camp is virtually empty of visitors. As in Warsaw the day before, there is a light rain and mist, and the autumn air is cold, a harbinger of winter.

The Majdanek camp is too beautiful—the green grass of the parade ground suggests a college campus, not a site of slave labor and mass executions. Can we stand here in this lush grassy meadow and imagine the mud, the dirt, the smell—the unrelenting gray horror of the thousands of prisoners in their ill-fitting striped suits standing at roll calls? Can we imagine the perpetually gray sky, filled with smoke from the crematorium just down the road? Perhaps it would be better to see the camp in the middle of winter when one is not overwhelmed by the color of the grass.

Throughout my pilgrimage to these Holocaust sites, I continually encounter odd juxtapositions—museums of horror amidst great natural beauty, signs of hope and optimism amidst remnants of death and evil. In Theresienstadt, I walk along the road to the crematorium on the outskirts of town. The road is beautiful, a country lane overgrown with trees. Since it is the end of the tourist season, my party is alone, until we come around a bend in the road and discover a throng of Israeli high school children, singing and carrying large Israeli flags. They are at once filled with joy and awe. They stop at a burial site, remain quiet for a moment, then begin snapping pictures with their cameras. Everyone is photographed in front of the monument. They march on down the road. Here the irony brings me to tears, tears of joy and sadness. Whatever

horrors the Holocaust inflicted on the Jewish people, there remain survivors, and many more generations of Jews. They come here to remember and to exult in their people's survival. They come here to take home snapshots of the ruins of the Nazi death machine.

I came to Eastern Europe to experience directly the places of the Nazi evil. Like the Israeli schoolchildren, I make this journey, in part, to assert my joy in being a survivor, however indirectly, of the plan to make Europe *judenrein*. But I also come to try to understand the scope of the evil perpetrated on the Jewish people. I want to see and touch and walk on the ground of the camps, as if their physical presence alone will convince me of the horror of history. But the sites are too beautiful—Nature prevents me from seeing, understanding, and feeling the true dimensions of the traces of the evil confronting me.

2. Domination

Why think about the environmental crisis and the Holocaust in each other's terms? Is there a relationship between ideas of the natural world and the concepts of domination and genocide? The Nazis thought so. As Robert-Jan Van Pelt recounts in his historical investigation of the development of Auschwitz, the reconstruction and development of Polish farmland under scientific principles of management was one of the major goals of German settlement in the conquered lands east of Germany. Van Pelt describes a trip through Poland in 1940 undertaken by Heinrich Himmler, the Reichskommissar for the resettlement of the German people. Himmler and his friend Henns Johst stand in a Polish field, holding the soil in their hands, and dream of the great agricultural and architectural projects to come: the re-creation of German farms and villages, the replanting of trees, shrubs, and hedgerows to protect the crops, and even the alteration of the climate by increasing dew and the formation of clouds.⁸ As part of this plan, of course, there would have to be an "ethnic cleansing" of the region—the Poles, both Gentile and Jewish, would have to be moved elsewhere or otherwise eliminated so that a German agricultural utopia could be developed. Thus we see that the control of nature—the management of agriculture so as to affect even the climate—was part of the Nazi plan. The domination of nature and humanity are clearly linked.

The control or domination of nature is also, to a certain extent, the central theme underlying the essays by Benstein and Schwartz. Both essays investigate the Jewish perspective of the proper relationship between humanity and nature. Schwartz's argument focuses on the moral significance of Judaism's rejection of paganism—the desacralization of natural processes. As a moral philosophy, Judaism attempts to place an ethical order on an amoral natural reality. To be human, to be a Jew, means to transcend natural laws in one's actions, to improve and repair the world—indeed, to complete the process of creation.⁹ Similarly, Benstein's analysis of the conflict between the study of Torah and the study of nature leads him to conclude that the primary flaw in

this context is the radical rupture between Nature and Torah. True wisdom is based on a synthesis, the understanding that the study of nature is a continuation of the study of Torah.¹⁰ Benstein thus emphasizes the argument by Rabbi Yosef Hayyim Caro that an appreciation of Nature should not be rejected, but that the study of Torah is a more trustworthy and clear means of reaching God than the study of Nature alone. Our knowledge of Nature, in brief, must be organized and modeled by our knowledge of spiritual law.¹¹

Both Benstein and Schwartz thus reveal the extent to which Jewish thought seeks to impose human ideas of truth and goodness on our understanding of the natural world. The imposition of a moral order on the material world of nature is required by the belief in Jewish law—the spiritual imperative for humans to act towards the natural world as God has commanded us through Torah. Although both Benstein and Schwartz leave open the specifics of the human-nature relationship, they clearly establish the framework for any possible synthesis. Human action regarding nature will be guided by the transcendent spiritual principles of Jewish law. We will respond to Nature according to the laws of God.

Modern Judaism thus finds itself squarely in the Western tradition of the domination of nature. As I have argued elsewhere, the primary goal of the Enlightenment project of the scientific understanding of the natural world is to control, manipulate, and modify natural processes for the increased satisfaction of human interests.¹² Humans want to live in a world that is comfortable—or at least, a world that is not hostile to human happiness and survival. This purpose is easy to understand when we view technological and industrial projects that use nature as a resource for economic development—but the irony is that the same purpose, human control, motivates much of environmentalist policy and practice.

Consider briefly those popular examples of an enlightened environmental policy: pollution control and abatement, the clean-up of hazardous waste sites, habitat and species preservation, saving the rainforest, and the reduction of greenhouse gases. All of these policies are based on the beneficial consequences that will result for human beings and human society. Although natural entities, such as endangered species and individual animals and plants, will also be helped by environmentalist practices, we, the human community, are the chief beneficiary of our policies. Indeed, we generally only preserve those natural habitats and species that provide us with some direct good—whether it be economic, aesthetic, or spiritual.

What ties together environmental policies such as these is their thoroughgoing anthropocentrism—human interests, satisfaction, goods, and happiness are the central goals of public policy and human action. This anthropocentrism is, of course, not surprising. Humanity is in the business of creating and maximizing human good.

Anthropocentrism as a world view quite easily leads to the practices of domination, even when such domination is not articulated. In the formation

of environmental policy, nature is seen as a nonhuman “other” to be controlled, manipulated, modified, or destroyed in the pursuit of human good. As a nonhuman other, nature can be understood as merely a resource for the development of human interests; as a nonhuman other, nature has no valid interests or good of its own. Even the practice of ecological restoration, in which degraded ecosystems are restored to a semblance of their original states, is permeated with this anthropocentric ideology. Natural ecosystems that have been harmed by human activity are restored to a state that is more pleasing to the current human population. A marsh that had been landfilled is reflooded to restore wetland acreage; strip-mined hills are replanted to create flowering meadows; acres of farmland are subjected to a controlled burn and a replanting with wildflowers and shrubs to recreate the oak savanna of pre-European America. We humans thus achieve two simultaneous goals: we relieve our guilt for the earlier destruction of natural systems, and we demonstrate our power—the power of science and technology—over the natural world.¹³

But the domination of nonhuman nature is not the only result of an anthropocentric worldview—the ideology of anthropocentric domination also extends to the oppression of other human beings, conceived as a philosophical “other,” as nonhuman or as subhuman. As C. S. Lewis wrote fifty years ago in *The Abolition of Man*, “what we call man’s power over nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with nature as its instrument.” The reason that this exercise of power is justifiable is that the subordinate people are not considered human beings: “they are not men at all; they are artefacts.”¹⁴ Anthropocentrism does not convert into a thoroughgoing humanism, wherein all humans are treated as equally worthwhile. Historically, the idea of human slavery has been justified from the time of the ancient Greeks onward by designating the slave class as less than human. In this century, the evaluation of other people as subhuman finds its clearest expression in the Nazi propaganda concerning the Jews, but we also find its echoes in the ethnic civil war in the former Yugoslavia. From the starting point of anthropocentrism, domination and oppression are easily justified. The oppressed class—be it a specific race or religious group, or even animals or natural entities—is simply denied admittance to the elite center of value-laden beings.¹⁵ From within anthropocentrism, only humans have value and only human interests and goods need to be pursued. But who or what counts as a human is a question that cannot be answered from within anthropocentrism—and the answer to this question will determine the extent of the practice of domination.

Thus the ideas of anthropocentrism and domination tie together a study of the Holocaust, the current environmental crisis, and the Jewish conception of the proper relationship to Nature. Schwartz reminds us that the danger in Judaism’s desacralization of Nature is that it may lead to the destruction of Nature.¹⁶ Genocide and ecocide are similar in that we conceive of our victims as less than human, as outside the primary circle of value.

3. Healing

The resurgence of trees in the Warsaw cemetery and the lush green grass of the meadow at Majdanek serve as a catalyst for rethinking the relationships among nature, humanity, and the practice of domination. In these places, one can only describe the processes of nature as a kind of healing, a soothing of the wounds wrought by the evil of the Holocaust. Does Nature make everything better? Can we say that dominated and oppressed entities are saved—redeemed—by the ordinary processes of the natural world? Does nature have this power? And if it does, what are the implications for the way in which humanity acts in relationship to the natural world?

First, we should note that Nature acts upon human beings, human institutions, and the products of human culture in powerful ways. So-called natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, are the prime examples of events in which natural forces impact on humanity. But ordinary weather, small changes in climate, and even the rotation of the earth are also activities of Nature—natural processes—that affect human life. If we broaden the range of our discourse, we can call this type of activity Nature's imperialism over humanity, for it has a parallel structure to the basic kind of human control over other humans, as well as to the human domination over Nature. Imperialism is a form of domination, in which one entity uses, takes advantage of, controls, or otherwise exerts force over another. If we consider Nature as both a possible subject and object of imperialism, then we can think of Nature as exerting its power—attempting to dominate—humanity, just as we can think of humanity attempting to dominate Nature.¹⁷

But my experiences in the Warsaw cemetery and at Majdanek suggest that Nature's domination in these places is benign; it is the healing of human atrocities, not the oppression of an imperialist. Nature provides the balm to restore the health and goodness of a world wounded by human evil, in this case the oppression and genocide of Eastern European Jewry. Is this an appropriate way to interpret the experiences of these places?

Probably not. Consider the reverse process, the human attempt to heal the wounds of nature, as in the process of ecological restoration that I mentioned above. We often tend to clean up natural areas polluted or damaged by human activity, such as the Alaskan coast harmed by the Exxon Valdez oil spill. But we also attempt to improve natural areas dramatically altered by natural events, such as a forest damaged by a massive brush fire, or a beach suffering severe natural erosion. In most of these kinds of cases, human science and technology is capable of making a significant change in the appearance and processes of the natural area. Forests can be replanted; oil is removed from the surface of bays and estuaries, sand and dune vegetation replenish a beach. But are these activities the healing of nature? Has human activity—science and technology—restored Nature to a healthy state?

No: when humans modify a natural area they create an artifact, a product of human labor and human design.¹⁸ This restored natural area may resemble

a wild and unmodified natural system, but it is, in actuality, a product of human thought, the result of human desires and interests. All humanly created artifacts are manifestations of human interests—from computer screens to rice pudding. An ecosystem restored by human activity may appear to be in a different category—it may appear to be an autonomous living system uncontrolled by human thought—but it nonetheless exhibits characteristics of human design and intentionality: it is created to meet human interests, to satisfy human desires, and to maximize human good.

Consider again my example of beach restoration. The eroded beach is replenished—with sand pumped from the ocean floor several miles offshore—because the human community does not want to maintain the natural status of the beach. The eroded beach threatens oceanfront homes and recreational beaches. Humanity prefers to restore the human benefits of a fully protected beach. The restored beach will resemble the original, but it will be the product of human technology, a humanly designed artifact for the promotion of human interests.

After human restoration and modification, what emerges is a Nature with a different character than the original. This is an ontological difference, a difference in the fundamental qualities of the restored area. A beach that is replenished by human technology is different from a beach created by natural forces such as wind and tides. A savanna replanted from wildflower seeds and weeds collected by human hands is different from grassland that develops on its own. The source of these new areas is different—man-made, technological, artificial. The restored Nature is not really Nature at all.

A Nature healed by human action is thus not Nature. As an artifact, it is designed to meet human purposes and needs—perhaps even the need for areas that look like a pristine, untouched Nature. In using our scientific and technological knowledge to restore natural areas, we actually practice another form of domination. We use our power to mold the natural world into a shape that is more amenable to our desires. We oppress the natural processes that function independently of human power; we prevent the autonomous development of the natural world. To believe that we heal or restore the natural world by the exercise of our technological power is, at best a self-deception, and at worst a rationalization for the continued degradation of Nature—for if we can heal the damage we inflict we will face no limits to our activities.

This conclusion has serious implications for the idea that Nature can repair human destruction, that Nature can somehow heal the evil that humans perpetuate on the earth. Just as a restored human landscape has a different causal history than the original natural system, the reemergence of Nature in a place of human genocide and destruction is based on a series of human events that cannot be erased. The natural vegetation that covers the mass grave in the Warsaw cemetery is not the same as the vegetation that would have grown there if the mass grave had never been dug. The grass and trees in the cemetery have a different cause, a different history, which is

inextricably linked to the history of Holocaust. The grassy field in the Majdanek parade ground does not cover and heal the mud and desolation of the death camp—it rather grows from the dirt and ashes of the site's victims. For anyone who has an understanding of the Holocaust, of the innumerable evils heaped upon an oppressed people by the Nazi regime, the richness of Nature cannot obliterate nor heal the horror.

4. Meanings

When we look at the processes of Nature at Holocaust sites, what we see is another example of Nature's imperialism over humanity—the mirror image of the human destruction of the natural environment. Nature here acts—without an intention or design—to erase the remnants of human evil. To speak in metaphor, Nature imposes its vision of the world on its human interpreters. But Nature's vision is not our vision, and in this case it does not express the meaning of the places we experience. Although the beauty of the trees in the cemetery cannot be denied, the meaning and value of the cemetery lies not in the trees but in the historical significance of the Nazi plan to kill the Jews of Eastern Europe.

Nature's reemergence at these Holocaust sites is a form of domination: the domination of meaning. Nature slowly exerts its power over the free development of human ideas, human history, and human memory. Now it may seem strange to think of the healing power of Nature—the healing power of anything—as a form of domination. But in *The Reawakening* Primo Levi describes his liberation from Auschwitz in terms that suggest this relationship. He recounts the series of baths that he and the other prisoners were given by the Allies: “It was easy to perceive behind the concrete and literal aspect a great symbolic shadow, the unconscious desire of the new authorities, who absorbed us in turn within their own sphere, to strip us of the vestiges of our former life, to make of us new men consistent with their own models, to impose their brand upon us.”¹⁹

But Levi also compares these baths of liberation with the “devilish-sacral” or “black-mass” bath given by the Nazis as he entered the universe of the concentration camps. Although there are clearly differences between the baths of the liberators and the baths of the Nazis, for Levi at least, all of the baths served as symbols of domination—the molding of human beings into creatures appropriate to their current situations. The cleansing of liberation is thus comparable to the oppression of imprisonment, for both actions deny the autonomy of the free human subject. Healing thus can be an expression of domination, if it modifies or destroys the meaning and the freedom of the original entity.²⁰

To understand the multiplicity of the forms of domination, however, is the first step towards developing a comprehensive ethic for evaluating human activity in relationship to both the natural environment and the human community. We must resist the practice of domination in all of its forms. We

must act so as to preserve the free and autonomous development of human individuals, communities, and natural systems. We must understand the moral limits of our power to control Nature and our fellow human beings.

Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated shortly after my return from Poland. My thoughts reached back to that day in September 1993 when he shook hands with his enemy, Yasir Arafat, and spoke the lines from the *kaddish* as a call for the healing power of peace. *O-se sha-lom bim-ro-mov hu ya-a-se sha-lom/ A-lay-nu v'al kol yis-ra-eyl v'im-ru a-mayn*. "May He who establishes peace in the heavens, grant peace unto us and unto all Israel." In viewing the Warsaw cemetery and the Majdanek death camp, I was moved by the hope that Nature could be the agent who establishes peace. But Nature alone cannot accomplish this. Nature's relationship to humanity is too complex. And thus I recall the group of Israeli school children on the road in Theresienstadt. The Jewish people survived the Holocaust, and they continue to survive today because they remember the Holocaust. The Jewish people persist because they remain true to their history, culture, spiritual beliefs, way of life, and because they pass these on to their children, one generation at a time. Now we live in an age in which we must include the preservation of nature in the bundle of ideas we pass on. If there is a God, He works through human knowledge and human will. Only humans can understand the meaning and history of evil. Only humans who understand the need to control our power can halt the practice of domination, can halt the destruction of people and the natural environment. It is only through human actions that peace can be restored to our planet and our civilization.²¹

NOTES

1. Jeremy Benstein, "'One, Walking and Studying . . .': Nature vs. Torah," *Judaism* 44:2 (Spring 1995): 146–168; and Eilon Schwartz, "Judaism and Nature: Theological and Moral Issues to Consider While Renegotiating a Jewish Relationship to the Natural World," *Judaism* 44: 4 (Fall 1995): 437–447.

2. Schwartz, p. 437.

3. Benstein, p. 147.

4. Benstein, pp. 149–150.

5. Eric Katz, "Judaism and the Ecological Crisis," in *Worldviews and Ecology*, *Bucknell Review* 38 (Number 2, 1993) edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim, pp. 55–70. Reprinted in *Worldviews and Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).

6. Schwartz, p. 443.

7. For a general discussion of Majdanek and the overall history of the Holocaust, see Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry*, translated by Ina Friedman and Haya Galai (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), especially pp. 362–63; Ronnie S. Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994); and Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War* (New York: Henry Holt, 1985). The death statistics cited in these recent works differ by an order of magnitude from Dawidowicz's classic work, which claims that 1.3 million Jews died at Majdanek. See Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933–1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1975), p. 149. Gilbert reports that Hitler was enraged that the German SS forces did not destroy the camp before the Russian advance (p. 711).

8. Robert-Jan Van Pelt, "A Site in Search of a Mission," in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, edited by Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 101-103.
9. Schwartz, pp. 442-443.
10. Benstein, p. 163.
11. Benstein, pp. 155-157.
12. See Eric Katz, "The Call of the Wild: The Struggle Against Domination and the 'Technological fix' of Nature," *Environmental Ethics* 14 (1992): 265-73; "Artefacts and Functions," *Environmental Values* 2 (1993): 223-32; and "Imperialism and Environmentalism," *Social Theory and Practice* 21:2 (Summer 1995): 271-85.
13. See Eric Katz, "The Big Lie: Human Restoration of Nature," *Research in Philosophy and Technology* 12 (1992): 231-41 and "Restoration and Redesign: The Ethical Significance of Human Intervention in Nature," *Restoration and Management Notes*, Vol. 9, no. 2 (1991): 90-96.
14. C. S. Lewis, "The Abolition of Man," reprinted in *Philosophy and Technology: Readings in the Philosophical Problems of Technology*, edited by Carl Mitcham and Robert Mackey (New York: Free Press, 1983), pp. 143-50, quotations from pp. 143 and 146. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* was originally published in 1947.
15. Thus the power of Peter Singer's argument that animal liberation is necessary to correct speciesism, a prejudice akin to racism or sexism. See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Avon, 1975), pp. 1-23. Also see Ze'ev Levy, "Ethical Issues of Animal Welfare in Jewish Thought," *Judaism* 45: 1 (Winter 1996): 45-57.
16. Schwartz, p. 443.
17. See Katz, "Imperialism and Environmentalism," pp. 273-74. Holmes Rolston III presents a sustained account of the idea of nature as the subject of an ongoing history. See Rolston, *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), esp. pp. 342-54.
18. The argument in this section is based on Katz, "The Big Lie," "Call of the Wild," and "Artefacts and Functions."
19. Primo Levi, *The Reawakening*, translated by Stuart Woolf (New York: Collier Books, 1987), p. 8.
20. Although it may appear paradoxical to think of the act of healing as a form of domination, consider the long-standing issue of Paternalism in the field of medical ethics. The use of medical procedures against the wishes of a fully rational patient is a violation of individual autonomy, even when these medical procedures are clearly in the best interests (i.e., the health) of the patient.
21. Parts of this essay appear in "Nature's Presence: Reflections on Healing and Domination," *Philosophy and Geography* I (1996); other sections were presented at the Society for Philosophy and Technology meeting, *Technology and the Holocaust*, in conjunction with the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association, Chicago, Illinois, April 25, 1996. I thank Rabbi Steven Shaw and David Szonyi of the Jewish Theological Seminary, as well as Andrew Light and Avner de-Shalit, for helpful comments. The trip to Eastern Europe was made possible by a sabbatical study leave from the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

J A Y L I V E S O N

Yad VaShem

No rearing hooves threatened at the entrance.
No soldiers strained in bronze.
In fact, she saw only
the line of visitors
twisting with her around
the pool of darkness
punctured by a solitary flame.
She strained to peel her pupils wide
to trap the light that flickered
in oscillating circles,
washed into shadows
and eddied into furrows
of Hebrew letters
gouged into the petrous carpet.
Except for coughs,
all speech was snuffed,
as if to cleanse the currents
of the mundane.
Only the softest monotone
lapped the borders of her hearing.
She wasn't sure
but, as she leaned towards the priest
just beyond her mother,
she swore his silent lips
shaped the word
"VeYiskadash"

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For and Against the “Righteous Gentiles”

BEREL LANG

“RIGHTEOUS GENTILES” IS THE COMMON TRANSLATION of the Hebrew “Hasidei Umoth Ha’olam” [literally, “Righteous among the Nations of the World”]—an honorific title now known mainly through its conferral by Yad Vashem on non-Jews who acted during the Holocaust to save Jewish life at the risk of their own. This use of the traditional phrase, however, is a misrepresentation of the conduct it is meant to honor as well as of other moral issues related to the Holocaust; furthermore, the weight of its distinctions between Jews and non-Jews and between “righteous” and other gentiles is invidious and offensive. As the language of the Holocaust itself was expressively significant in the unfolding of that event, so the language of post-Holocaust reflection ought to be considered—and questioned—in its effects on the shape of this history.

The fault in the “Righteous Gentiles” is not, to be sure, in the rescuers or their actions, or in the decision to honor them. Rather it is in the concept of “*Righteous*” Gentiles—the standard by which they are judged and which, by implication, the larger number of other, “non-righteous” gentiles failed to meet. This criterion, I should argue, produces a two-fold distortion—at once of diminishing and exaggerating. It diminishes the acts of the gentile rescuers of Jews—since the responses in which they risked their lives were clearly more than only “righteous”; at the same time it exaggerates what the other, “non-righteous” gentiles were morally obligated to do, as it implies that they too ought to have risked their lives as the rescuers did. The effect of this twofold distortion, furthermore, is to obscure the common and actual responsibility of the non-Jews touched by the Holocaust which was more fundamental and in the end more consequential than the responsibility attributed to them on the invidious comparison between them as a group and the much smaller group of heroic rescuers.

Again: the “Righteous Gentiles” cited by Yad Vashem are individuals or groups who in the Nazi-occupied countries of Europe risked their lives in order to save Jews—and who, after passing an examination of the evidence by a Committee at Yad Vashem, are then formally recognized. (As of the end of 1995, 13,618 names had been so designated.) And the issue that emerges here

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is not with the probative process but with its conclusion—that is, in the status and implications of the term “righteous” itself.

To judge someone as righteous ordinarily implies that that person has acted as he or she ought to have, presumably meeting their obligations more fully than is usual (otherwise there would be no reason for mentioning it at all), but not necessarily doing more than is required of them or anyone else. To act righteously, after all, is just to do what one ought to. This connection between righteousness and the fulfillment of obligations, furthermore, is part of the connotation of the corresponding Hebrew phrase in its traditional usage. The phrase’s earliest (and slightly different) appearance [Tosefta Sanhedrin, xiii, 2] refers to “*Tsadikei* Umot Ha’olam” rather than to “*Hasidei* . . .”—“*Tsadikei*” being more narrowly “righteous” than “*Hasidei*,” with its nuance of “pietist” or “loyalist.” Subsequently (in Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*), “*Hasidei Umot Ha’olam*” designates any non-Jew who observes the seven Noachide laws; it has otherwise been applied more generally to non-Jews “who stood by Jews in an hour of adversity.”¹

A common feature of these diverse contexts is the absence from them all of any stipulation that the “Righteous among the Nations of the World” must go beyond the expectations of normal—rightful—moral conduct. The title thus applies to non-Jews who reacted as they should have in the circumstances indicated, making allowance for the fact that they were limited (the condescension here is undeniable) by their identity as non-Jews; that is, by their place among the “*Umoth Ha’olam*.” Accordingly, when “righteous” comes to be applied in the aftermath of the Holocaust only to gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews, this implies that they also did in those circumstances what they should have done: no less, but also no more. Even though their recognition as “righteous” points by contrast to the response of others among the “nations” who did less than they did, this does not mean that the “Righteous” Gentiles did more than they *ought* to have. To do what one should do, after all, is only right. This implication then joins the fact that the number of “Righteous Gentiles” is relatively small (and unlikely to grow much larger), indicating the further conclusion that the other, “Non-righteous” Gentiles (for the Holocaust, the 300,000,000 other non-Jewish inhabitants of Nazi-Occupied Europe) were remiss in not doing what *they* should have done. In sum, then, the “Righteous Gentiles” did only what they ought to have—and what the much larger majority of their fellow-Gentiles were guilty of not doing.

The principal issue involved in judging the “Righteous” Gentiles thus occurs in the related questions, on the one hand, of what the gentiles (viewed as a single group) did or did not do and, on the other hand, of what they *should* have done. But this is not the only issue raised by the application of that moral criterion. In addition to its invidious distinction between the Righteous and the Non-righteous Gentiles, it implies a similarly invidious distinction between the gentiles (as a group) and the Jews. Why, after all, single out for recognition the quality of righteousness among gentiles—unless that characteristic could sim-

ply be taken for granted among the non-gentiles, that is, among the Jews? To be sure, the commemorative institutions of the Holocaust sometimes link the memory of that event's destructiveness with a celebration of heroism (the official Israeli "Holocaust Day"—intended to coincide, as closely as it could, with the beginning of the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto—is formally the "Day of the Holocaust and of Heroism"). But relatively little has been said or written about that heroic aspect in connection with the ritualization of "Holocaust Day." Certainly there has been no official effort, in that context or any other, to gather the names of Jews who conducted themselves heroically, as has been done in respect to the non-Jewish rescuers.

One reason for the latter absence has nothing to do with the question of whether some Jews conducted themselves more "righteously" than others during the Holocaust. It remains a harsh truth that among the millions of Jewish victims, all of them, including those who might be said to have acted badly, paid in the end with their lives, and only because they were Jews. As honorific titles in general are nullified by death, so too, it seems, invidious moral distinctions, drawn in retrospect among the Jewish victims, are out of place.

The consequences of the invidious implication of the "Righteous" Gentile do not stop here, however. What I have suggested to be the trivializing effect of this tribute to the non-Jewish rescuers also suggests—inversely—a misleading exaggeration in the status of the Jewish victims. For if the Gentiles who risked their lives are "righteous," then the Jews, for whom death was mandated—a certainty—ought by that additional burden to warrant a stronger term of approbation. At least reasoning of this sort seems required to explain the use of words like "holy" or "heroic" or "martyred" in religious or commemorative references to the Jewish victims, in contrast to those terms' more usual application to individuals who in some measure chose their fates. It was, after all, the persecutors who determined in the Holocaust who would or would not count as a Jew, with the Jews so identified including some who had rejected that identity no less than others who affirmed it, and with similar indifference to their characters or to the kind of lives members of either of these groups had lived. As imposed identity differs essentially from an identity freely chosen, we see again the consequences of an invidious distinction—this one in respect to the Jews in the Holocaust—with its roots in the application of "Righteous" only to certain gentiles.

Even considered without reference to these other implications, however, the criterion of "righteousness" remains an inadequate measure—first, of the non-Jewish rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, but then also of the non-Jewish non-rescuers. The conditions applied by Yad Vashem in judging "Righteous Gentiles" include no requirement that they have observed the seven Noachide commandments (let alone, as Maimonides stipulates, that this observance should have followed from belief in those commandments' divine authority). On the other hand, the rescuers clearly meet the criterion of "standing by Jews in an hour of adversity"—but they go beyond it so markedly

that to describe them as satisfying that condition becomes an understatement which borders on misrepresentation.

The demanding standards applied by Yad Vashem's examining committee to nominations for the title of "Righteous Gentile" are explicit. The designation is reserved for gentiles (1) who aided Jews in danger of being killed or sent to concentration camps, and (2) who were aware that they were risking their lives in providing that aid; and (3) who acted without requiring or expecting material reward, and (4) whose aid was active, not passive (as when "rescuers" only refrained from turning someone over to the Nazis).

The second of these requirements clearly exceeds any criterion historically associated with the concept of the "Righteous Gentile." Of course, great value is attached in the Jewish tradition to the saving of human life; thus, the frequently cited Talmudic line that "He who saves a single life, it is as if he saves the world." But nothing said in affirmation of this value or of the conditions traditionally set for the Righteous Gentiles obligates anyone (Jew or non-Jew) to risk their or their family's own lives in behalf of other people, not even in the extreme situation where those other people's lives are at risk. Indeed one has to look far in any legal or moral code, irrespective of culture and time, to find legislation or practice that makes it mandatory—not praiseworthy, but mandatory—for a person to put his or his family's lives at risk for others, even when the failure to do this makes it more likely that other people may lose theirs. Perhaps such a legal or moral standard should exist—but it doesn't. The few states in the U.S. which have "Good Samaritan" laws that require giving aid to others in circumstances where the latter's lives are in danger specifically exclude those situations where the rescuer might himself be endangered by doing so. And certainly the requirement in Jewish law that a person ought himself to suffer death rather than commit murder is not a positive commandment for self-sacrifice in the cause of saving other people's lives. When it is the case that someone else's life will be at risk (through no doing of your own) unless you risk your own to save him, Jewish law (although with some dissenting opinion) has generally followed Rabbi Akiba's dictum: "Thy [own] life comes first."

These considerations do not mean that the people confirmed by Yad Vashem's scrutiny are not "Righteous Gentiles" in that phrase's traditional meaning; surely they are. But the designation by itself does not do them full justice because their actions show them to be more than righteous. What they did went well "above and beyond the call of duty," certainly beyond what is in any usual sense obligatory for the situation in which they found themselves. Their deeds, in other words, were supererogatory, meritorious but (because) not required—precisely what distinguishes heroism from ordinary acts and obligations. No one has a duty to be heroic; to claim that is a self-contradiction. And the rescuers now called "Righteous" were by common standards not righteous but heroic.

There can be no doubt that the "Righteous" Gentiles—anyone—who voluntarily took the risks that they did should be honored. But again, the

measure of honor due them is not because they did what was incumbent on them, but precisely because it was not. Their acts, they came to know afterward and might have predicted beforehand, placed them in a precarious minority, inviting threats to themselves and their families which neither social nor religious standards required them to incur. Anyone who doubts the extraordinary status of this conduct would do well to consider—quite apart from what our formal legal and moral principles say about such situations—who among the members of their own community they could rely on to act as the supposedly only “Righteous” non-Jewish citizens of Nazi-occupied countries did under the circumstances they faced. More immediately, we might each ask ourselves what, and how much, and for whom we would be willing to risk what those rescuers risked.

It is true that in the Nazi-occupied countries of Western Europe, non-Jewish rescuers of Jews did not, if caught, face the automatic death penalty imposed in Poland. Those who helped shelter the family of Anne Frank in Amsterdam, for example, were “only” sent to concentration camps. But of course the threat of death was present there, and some Western rescuers died in consequence of their selflessness. In choosing to act as they did, they could not have been unaware of this possibility.

Typically, the autobiographical accounts by “Righteous Gentiles” are low-keyed and self-effacing, describing the help they voluntarily offered as “only right,” or as based on the teaching of moral or religious (specifically, Christian) principles.² There is no reason to doubt the explanations stated in these modest self-descriptions as their authors understood and acted on them; but neither are the authors’ own accounts of their motives decisive for judging what they did. Some authentic heroes might, quite differently, claim or boast about their heroism; but just as such statements would not substantiate and would certainly not add to the quality of the actions they refer to, neither should a disclaimer of heroism diminish or nullify that achievement. Even the views sometimes expressed by the rescuers that what they did was a “natural” human response or that it fulfilled a universal moral obligation do not prove either of those claims. Again: the occurrence of self-sacrifice as an extreme instance of altruism is socially recognized—generally regarded as noteworthy and deserving of honor. But it is in general (or, I have claimed, ever) not formulated as a moral imperative or norm. And although ethical ideals are not determined only on the basis of past practices or beliefs, where no instances of a particular requirement appear in the long history of ethics, this would, it seems, count as evidence against its status as a norm.

Applying historical judgment retrospectively to conditions in which life and death weighed in the balance is always fraught, turning easily to cant—and moral hindsight is even more subject to this danger than other judgments made after the fact. To contrast the small number of “Righteous Gentiles” with the hundreds of millions of others then viewed as having failed morally is an instance of this cant, not because of the difference in numbers but because of the supposed

basis of the distinction. For the contrast thus drawn at once understates the magnitude of what the “More-Than-Righteous” Gentiles did—and exaggerates what was obligatory for those who were not. And an even more serious moral consequence follows from a third implication—the reduction of heroic acts to only righteous ones diverts attention from a larger group of “un-righteous” acts which had far more significant consequences in the history of the Holocaust. I refer here to the decisions and acts by non-Jews which were also voluntary, not obligatory, but which contributed (and would have been known beforehand to do this) to the weight intended to crush the Jewish people—and which, if they had *not* been done, would have incurred no risk for those who avoided them.

Not to volunteer for the voluntary organizations of the Nazi apparatus: the S.S., the Einsatzgruppen, the teams of “mercy-killers,” the Nazi Party itself; *not* to take advantage of the opportunistic “windfalls” which occurred as Jews were deported; not to take over their businesses or apartments or belongings, to assume their professional positions or practices; *not*, at a farther extreme, to brutalize or to torture—all these varieties of voluntary action could have been avoided without serious risk, almost all of them with little risk whatever. At each of the junctures named, the agents had before them the option of deciding to act by declining to act: that is, to act by *inaction*. And insofar as the decision for inaction would at these points have required no heroism, would have required only not doing what should not have been done—that was also, we may conclude, what those who had the decision to make ought to have done, what could reasonably have been expected of them. It is at this more mundane and commonplace level that righteousness became and should now remain central to the judgment in relation to the Holocaust—of what could, and should, or could not, or should not, have been done—here in the balances of a scale with murder on one side and, on the other, the temptations of material comfort, or professional advancement, or “saving face,” or perhaps only the pleasure of wrongdoing. To honor the heroic and “More-than-Righteous” gentiles in no way diminishes the responsibility of the much larger number of others who were (as they then, and we too now, might be) less than heroic. Quite the contrary. To identify and honor those who are heroic means that the burden of being “righteous” goes back where it belongs, in the day-to-day life of ordinary people who are not and perhaps cannot be heroes, but who are nonetheless responsible for knowing and acting on the principles of common humanity. That is, for being righteous.

NOTES

1. E. E. Urbach, *The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs*, translated by Israel Abrahams, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 544; see also Michael Zevi Nehorai, “Righteous Gentiles Have a Share in the World To Come,” *Tarbiz* LXI (1992): 465–487.

2. See, e.g., M. Paldiel, *The Path of the Righteous: Gentile Rescuers of the Jews during the Holocaust* (Hoboken: KTAV, 1993).

RICHARD FEIN

A Jewish Girl in Cracow, 1939

The snow,
like baking powder,
dusts your smart beret,
forehead and hair.
How light your glance, as you stand
in the slush and mud—
button-rims with dark navels,
lapels slanting into the collar,
your bare right hand
sliding into your left sleeve.

If your grandparents had left Cracow,
as mine left Kovno in 1901,
you might have been born in Brooklyn.
We might have gone out together,
necking at the movies,
wondering how far we should go in the dark.

RICHARD FEIN's *collections of poetry include* Kafka's Ear, At the Turkish Bath, *and* To Move into the House. *He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

Rescue During the Holocaust—and Today

LEONARD GROB

THE MEDAL AWARDED TO RESCUERS BY YAD VASHEM, THE Israeli Holocaust memorial authority, bears the Talmudic inscription: “Whoever saves a single soul, it is as if he had saved the whole world.” One interpretation of this saying envisions the world as hanging in the balance between good and evil. The deed of the rescuer tips the scale in favor of the good, and thus contributes to the redemption of all.

The acts of rescuers lead us to *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world. They give the lie to many accepted assumptions about human nature. The Holocaust provides examples which shatter conventional notions of evil and good. Its perpetrators prompt us to question the inevitability of human progress toward goodness, while its rescuers call upon us to rethink notions of human beings as merely self-serving. Rescuers act as provocateurs. In the spirit of the Rabbinic interpretation, the rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust can be understood to have saved the world in its entirety.

How have these rescuers sown these seeds of redemption? If the Holocaust is truly a transformational event, then we must be open to its revolutionary impact on our thoughts and our speech. Although we may not be silent in a literal sense, neither can we speak any longer as we have spoken before. To protect in some measure against trivialization and falsification, we must open ourselves to a new language of morality; we must approach such terms as “good” and “evil” with nothing short of “fear and trembling.”¹

Contemporary notions of good and evil—influenced both by Enlightenment ideals and by the social and behavioral sciences—are often built on a tacit acceptance of self-interest as the determinant of human conduct. Here self-interest reigns both in the world of the individual and in that of society as a whole. In a post-Enlightenment world, “evil” occurs when an individual’s self-interest prompts anti-social behavior, which runs counter to societal self-interest; “good,” on the other hand, occurs when individual and societal self-interest exist in harmony with one another. In both instances, the hegemony of self-interest in human affairs remains unquestioned.

Both the conduct of perpetrators and that of rescuers during the Holocaust challenge these assumptions about how humans behave. Evil, for example, seems not necessarily to be grounded in self-interest, as we commonly know it. The student of the Nazi war effort would expect to learn in her or his studies about an extreme case of “power politics”: self-interest writ large. And yet a study of the Nazi

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strategy shows clearly that *realpolitik*, an alleged bottom line in the relationships among nations, was often subordinated to other motive forces as Hitler pursued his “second war” against the Jews. A potential labor force for the Reich was systematically slaughtered; the vital railway system was sometimes placed at the disposal of those for whom the movement of condemned Jews took precedence over the transportation of *Wehrmacht* troops or war materiel; and crucial technologies were utilized not to further the advance of the Reich’s military units, but rather to refine the machinery of death for Jewish civilians. Self-interest, narrowly understood, cannot adequately explain the conduct of World War II by the Nazi leadership.

It is not only the behavior of perpetrators which urges us to rethink the role of self-interest in human morality. As the acts of perpetrators prompt us to redefine what we mean by “evil,” so the actions of rescuers call into question what we mean by “good.” The conduct of those who risked their own and their families’ lives to save Jews cannot be reduced to assumptions about the primacy of “looking out for number one.” Rescuers call into question some deeply-ingrained beliefs concerning the nature of human nature.

One strand of the Western philosophical tradition emphasizes the fundamentally self-serving character of human nature. From Thomas Hobbes’s characterization of human animals as innately greedy, ruled by their passions for self-aggrandizement in the “war of all against all,”² to Sigmund Freud’s depiction of man as a “wolf to man,”³ Western thought has been haunted by what some have called a secular version of original sin.⁴ In this view, instances of goodness are (merely) learned forms of conduct which of necessity are derivative and thus ultimately superficial. Go beneath the surface of so-called altruistic behavior, it is often said, and you will find the raging passions of a naturally self-aggrandizing individual. Let the going get rough, and our innately “nasty and brutish”⁵ selves will peep through a kindly veneer.⁶

And even when contemporary social scientists reject notions of nastiness and brutishness in favor of a seemingly more benign self-interest at the core of the human condition, the tacit claim that humans are fundamentally appropriative beings remains. Altruism, in this view, is just a surface mode of being—and one ultimately reducible to the self-interest it seemingly negates. The suspicion that there is always “something in it for me”—a bottom of all bottom lines—belies any claim the altruist might make to wholeness of motive.

It should be noted here that the concept of self-interest discussed above and throughout this essay is a concept of self-interest *narrowly conceived*. This self-interest must be distinguished from what Martin Buber calls “biological self-relatedness.” The latter is a given of all living creatures; the former a determinate path of self-aggrandizement, freely chosen by an individual. In Buber’s words, self-interest in its basic sense, is the healthy striving of the organism. “Certainly, every living being, including man, experiences his life in its relationship to himself; each is naturally concerned with the preservation of its existence, the betterment of its lot. . . .”⁷ Narrowly conceived self-interest, on the other hand, is self-interest which has become fixed as *the* purpose of human existence. Again, in Buber’s words: “. . . biological self-relatedness in man . . . easily becomes a “mania.” . . . Self-seeking is not something given man by nature, but the event of a twisting through which the biological presuppositions of the individual life-reality, the self-relatedness, is made into goal and intention. . . .”⁸ It is this latter understanding of self-interest which is so often

substituted for the former in both social-scientific writing and in ordinary, commonly held assumptions about how humans behave. The conduct of rescuers during the Holocaust challenges the primacy of this view of self-interest in human nature.

Although the acts of rescuers cast profound doubt on conventional assumptions, stated or unstated, regarding the fundamentally selfish nature of the human being, it is not the case that acts of rescue merely suggest the replacement of one set of givens in human nature with another. The study of rescuers gives little support to any contrasting vision of the human creature as fundamentally *good*, fundamentally given over to altruism. As the example of Oskar Schindler illustrates so vividly, rescue was embraced by many whose nature could hardly be said to be saintly. Rescuers do not come to teach us that humans are innately good. Those who saved Jews during the Holocaust were flawed beings. They were creatures with unclean hands—finite, imperfect beings like the rest of us.

What, then, does the witness of the rescuer suggest regarding the human condition? Human nature, we can learn, is constituted neither by the good nor by the evil as such: the behavior of rescuers recalls the fundamentally self-constituting nature of humans. As Jean-Paul Sartre and other Existentialist thinkers never tire of reminding us, human nature is more verb than noun, more process than fixed product, a nature-that-makes-itself continually—choosing, unchoosing, rechoosing its moral path. How we act is for us an issue, a task rather than a given. Unlike the plant that bends with every wind, the human creature is a being the shape of whose existence is always in question for itself.⁹ That rescuers did gain some pleasure from their altruistic deeds is no sure sign that they acted *from* the mere pursuit of pleasure. That they felt satisfaction after the fact is no proof that self-interest was the motive force for their conduct; rather, they gave themselves a motive in the course of choosing a moral path.

For rescuers during the Holocaust, then, “how to be” was indeed an issue. In the face of nearly universal apathy regarding the fate of their Jewish neighbors, rescuers chose a different path. The lives of rescuers succeeded in opening a clearing, a path which combats the facile, unthinking reductionism at the heart of many theories of human nature. By force of example, they model responsibility for the full range of behaviors; neither the good nor the evil is in and of itself “normal.” Human creatures give themselves the nature they choose.

For the notion of “power,” so often assumed to constitute the fundamental human dynamic, we can now substitute the concept of “em-power-ment.” By situating ourselves within the clearing opened by the deeds of rescuers, we learn to avoid falling back on notions of a reified human nature from which all acts or deeds would naturally and necessarily follow. By allowing their witness to teach us who we are in the fullness of our potential, rescuers expose the (existential) fallacy of seeing our so-called “acts” as fully determined—and thus not acts at all, in any meaningful sense of that word.

Reductionist thinking, however, dies hard. Is it not possible, say the doubters, that rescuer behavior may only *appear* to have escaped the rule of self-interest narrowly conceived? How can we know for certain that acts of rescue are carried out from a fundamental purity of heart? Might not the motives for these deeds be ultimately reducible to that desire for self-aggrandizement consistent with a definition of human nature as appropriative and bellicose? How can rescuers dispel the overriding suspicion that their testimony is not quite what it is? How can they

counter those who would “unpack” their words to discover, at bottom, a bottom line? How can they disprove the notion that the “wolves,” which Freud alleges we are toward one another, may very well appear in sheep’s clothing?

To put an end to the interminable suspicions of our unthinking theorist of the human condition, a response of a different order is called for: One cannot simply do battle with a reductionist on her/his own terms. For every claim that the rescuer, like all his/her fellow humans is “looking out for number one,” the rescuer cannot, on principle, offer a mere counter-claim regarding, let us say, the fundamentally altruistic makeup of the human animal. In the face of reductionism, such a counter-claim can never run counter enough. Rescuers have “only” their witness to their living deed as the means to dispel the suspicion of the skeptic. Rather than positing an alternative discursive claim to the one offered by the doubter, the rescuer “simply” bears witness, simply attests with the fullness of her/his being, to a goodness of motive. My own interviews with rescuers constituted no mere debriefings, no mere transmissions of information; rather, during some moments of the encounters, an existential event took place—what I, employing traditional religious language, have called “witnessing.” Such an event becomes self-validating in nature.

To speak with rescuers is to find oneself in the presence of a living truth. Amid their many and varied self-characterizations, rescuers are nearly unanimous in describing the immediacy and the directness of their response to requests for help. One after another, rescuers during the Holocaust speak of agreeing to help simply because that was “the thing to do,” the thing which any feeling person would have done. “The absence of any cost/benefit analysis . . . was remarkable in individuals having to decide whether to risk their lives to save others.”¹⁰ “What else could I do?” was the common refrain of rescuers across Europe.

In the course of my interviews with Berlin rescuers, the same themes frequently reappeared. Over the course of three years, Edith Hirschfeldt never hesitated in taking in nearly a dozen members of a small but highly active Jewish resistance group and hiding them in her Berlin apartment. This apartment became a “safe house” for members of the Jewish resistance engaged in the dangerous work of preparing and distributing anti-Nazi leaflets. In response to my asking why she had done what she did, Edith replied: “You don’t think, ‘There is someone in my home, when they find me and this person, what will happen?’ This was terrible . . . they were poor people . . . I would have helped somebody who was homeless and freezing to death. . . .”¹¹

Frieda Adam, a rescuer from the Eastern part of Berlin, testified in a similar vein that she was simply acting “as any decent person (*Mensch*) would have acted”¹² in welcoming Erna Puterman, a former colleague in a sewing shop, into the two-room apartment in which she and her three children lived. Over and over again Mrs. Adam claimed she was only doing “what was right.” Although she had not seen Mrs. Puterman for the year and a half during which time this acquaintance had been transferred by the Nazis to a chemical plant, Mrs. Adam had no difficulty in responding to the (proverbial) knock on the door; she only did what was, to her mind, “natural.”

Just as these examples of rescue challenge theories of human nature, a substance with supposedly fixed characteristics, so too do these same examples call into question notions of human socialization. Behaviorist accounts of how we conduct ourselves are just another means of reifying the human creature. Humans are not, as some behaviorist theorists would have it, fundamentally passive

receptors, absorbing environmental stimuli. As many scholars have argued,¹³ there are no absolute environmental predictors of rescuer—or, for that matter, bystander—behavior. For every example of an allegedly definitive stimulus/response pattern operative in human affairs, there exists a counter-example. Human nature overflows any endeavor to explain it using the conceptual categories of either nature or nurture—or even some combination of both.

This is not to say that there are no commonalities to be found in the personal backgrounds of rescuers during the Holocaust. In the last decade, large-scale studies have delineated some of these common personality traits, as well as those situational factors found either to increase or decrease the probability that these personal characteristics would lead to rescuer behavior. Although no two studies emerge with identical findings, certain personal attributes repeat themselves across the wide body of research. In her study of 754 rescuers entitled *When Light Pierced the Darkness*,¹⁴ Nechama Tec found six characteristics to be largely shared among her interviewees: (1) individuality; (2) independence; (3) a history of altruistic behavior towards those who are helpless; (4) a perception of their own helping activity as merely ordinary; (5) an unplanned onset to the act of rescue; and (6) the understanding of Jews as persons like any others. Samuel and Pearl Oliner¹⁵ emphasize the interplay between personal and situational factors in their “social psychological” study. Compared to non-rescuers, interviewed along with rescuers, the latter exhibited, among many other characteristics, greater hostility toward Nazis; a stronger tendency to see Jews as individuals; a marked inclination to interpret religious teachings as commanding respect for the common humanity of all, including Jews; a greater focus, from childhood training, on others rather than on the self; a history of parental discipline which was accompanied by rational explanation; and a stronger sense of personal efficacy and self-esteem. The Oliners summarize some major distinguishing characteristics under the heading of “extensivity.” Rescuers had backgrounds which fostered involvement, commitment, care, and responsibility.

Eva Fogelman’s recently published *Conscience and Courage*¹⁶ also describes the rescuer’s childhood as one which fostered self-esteem—especially the sense that one can “make a difference.” Fogelman found, as well, that many rescuers had experienced separation, loss, or illness in childhood, all of which encouraged a growing sensitivity to the pain of others. Rescuers appeared to fit into one of five categories: (1) those who acted for moral reasons; (2) those who primarily acted out of their love of Jews; (3) those who were motivated by anti-Nazi sentiments; (4) those who acted as concerned helping professionals, viewing Jews as “clients”; and (5) those who were the children of rescuers. Like her colleagues, Fogelman stresses the interplay of personal and situational factors: “Action may come from the core of the self, but it is inhibited or reinforced by situational factors.”¹⁷

While these scholars make no claim regarding the sufficiency, or even the necessity, of the traits enumerated in their respective typologies, the very enterprise of typing rescuers *at all* prompts immediate caution. We must acknowledge the uniqueness of each act of rescue; we must respect the ultimately irreducible nature of the deed—and the doer. In fact, rescuers come in all “shapes and sizes.” They vary widely in social and economic status, in education, in religious background, in the political orientation of their families. No one profile of early influences is adequate to explain a rescuer’s behavior; no individual variable, or even cluster of variables, can account for the phenomenon of rescue. In the words of one scholar of the rescue

phenomenon, "For every case that confirms a particular hypothesis [regarding sufficiency of motive], another can be found that challenges it."¹⁸ Thus a religious background could be both proof *for* or proof *against* rescuer behavior: The conduct of the Huguenots of Le Chambon sur Lignon who saved many Jews from deportation to Auschwitz must be placed side by side with the actions of those who murdered Jews in the name of their Christian faith. Although many rescuers knew and loved their Jewish neighbors, other rescuers had had little or no contact with Jews. While most rescuers came from caring homes, others had experienced little childhood training in altruism; some had even been victims of abuse. And while many came from families which taught the questioning of authority, others had been exposed to an early environment in which unquestioning obedience to authority was the norm.

Thus the very exercise of seeking special rescuer traits is fraught with danger: Behavioral scientists must avoid the lure of believing in the efficacy of a body of fixed characteristics that lead to altruistic behavior. Rather, they must affirm the living choices which give these characteristics meaning and sustain them. For example, it was not the objective fact of how much knowledge one had of the plight of Jews that determined whether or not one became a rescuer. Rather, rescuers distinguished themselves from non-rescuers by the *significance they gave such knowledge*. It was not the mere fact of whether an individual had or had not known Jews personally that determined whether that person would become a rescuer. The individual had to attribute a peculiar significance to such early friendships—or their absence. As always, it is this meaning-making activity which constitutes the essentially *human* condition.

The temptation to seize on one or a set of variables as adequate explanations is ever-present. The scholar of the rescue phenomenon is always in danger of believing that she or he has "found it," has discovered the key variable(s). This was brought home to me vividly in the course of my visit with Edith Hirschfeldt. Mrs. Hirschfeldt told a moving tale. At the age of six, on an outing with her father in pre-World War I Berlin, she was amazed to see the Kaiser and his entourage on horseback coming down the avenue. Berliners from all sides greeted their leader with the traditional gesture of bowing. Before she could act, Edith's father whispered words which stuck in her memory ever since: "Don't bow down to the Kaiser."

Such a healthy disregard for unthinking allegiance to a fellow human might well have contributed to the formation of character which would later lead Edith to open her home to members of the Jewish resistance. *For this early training to have left its mark, however, Edith must have chosen, in an ongoing fashion, to reinforce this lesson, to sustain and cherish it as part of the motive force leading ultimately to her rescue activity.* Without a perpetual reaffirmation of the value of a so-called "value," the latter constitutes a mere datum, at best awaiting actualization as the impetus toward moral conduct.

This choosing of one's past-made-present is thus no mere reaction to sets of stimuli. There is also an aspect of mystery about the ultimate choice of risking one's life to save another, as there is mystery, to some degree, about *all* human choice. One strand of the scholarly debate on the motives of rescuers addresses the question of whether or not a *fundamental* mystery surrounds the impetus toward rescue. To assume the presence of such mystery would prompt us to abandon all efforts both to comprehend the rescuer's motives and to educate toward rescue in our homes and schools. Here, however, we must be wary of constituting false dichotomies. Yes, there *is* mystery about the ultimate call to an act of rescue. To

make this claim, however, is not to say that the issue of rescuer motivation is cloaked in utter darkness, which can never be pierced. True “mystery” is an ontological category, referring in this instance to the ultimately ineluctable nature of the workings of human motivation. The motivation of rescuers is indeed rooted in the grand mystery surrounding the origins of human conduct. To honor that which is, finally, ineluctable about the rescue decision, however, is not necessarily to abandon the quest for the parameters of moral education. In fact, I would argue that it is to engage for the first time in an *authentic* quest for these very parameters.

We must, of course, respect the fact that all generalizations about human motivation are risky, that such actions as those chosen by rescuers are made *in the moment*. “. . . for here,” Buber tells us, “there is no once-for-all: in each situation that demands decision the demarcation line must be drawn anew—not necessarily with fear, but necessarily with that trembling of the soul which precedes every genuine decision. . . .”¹⁹ At the same time, we must recall that we bring to the “living moment” a personal and cultural history marked either by the presence or absence of many of the (so-called) “factors” detailed by Oliner, Fogelman, Tec, and others. These “factors” must be reaffirmed by the rescuer in order for them to become continuously motivating forces. Yet these forces can be—and have been—identified. Several scholars, including those mentioned, have indeed shed light on the rescue phenomenon. In the words of Harold Schulweis, “Goodness must be studied. Goodness is no less a mystery than evil.”²⁰ (And, we might add, no more.) We must endeavor to grasp the phenomenon of altruism, and to uncover possibilities for teaching it, *in the spirit of fundamental respect for that-which-cannot-be-taught or understood*. We must attempt to remove “mystery-ousness”—the mere aura of that which puzzles us—while allowing for the presence of true mystery.²¹ That which *can be* illuminated by inquiry must be so illuminated. We must honor the notion, advanced by Buber, that encountering the other person in the fullness of her or his personhood involves both “will and grace.”²² The former, as Buber uses the term, is, in some sense, teachable; the latter remains in the realm of the sacred unknown—and unknowable.

How, then, do we go about this process of teaching goodness? No simple formula exists. The presence of mystery at the core of rescuer acts means that we must reject any facile solutions to the problem of human response to evil. We cannot, for example, accept the premise that human injustice can be addressed simply by teaching about the horrors of oppression. Yet the groundwork for educating-toward-rescue *can* be laid. As I have already argued, we can, and must, open a clearing within which our young people can envision themselves as doers of good—even as, in an extended sense of this term, agents of rescue. In pointing to the ultimately reductive nature of most theories of human nature and addressing critically those accounts of socialization which rest solely on stimulus-response models, we begin the process of empowering our students and ourselves to act as authentic moral agents. In this way we realize and make evident the access to a full range of possibilities, a panoply of choices from which to construct a life-which-has-moral-import, a life which can thus be called “human” in the fullest sense of that word.

In order to do this we must unpack not only traditional philosophical assumptions about human nature, but also the more popular lore as to the nature of who or what is heroic. In an age in which “looking out for oneself” has become

the norm, the exercise of moral agency often appears to be nothing short of heroic. Yet the rescuers saw themselves as anything but heroes. We must demystify the “heroic.” How easy it is to celebrate the hero, the extraordinary human who, by dint of stepping outside the customary bounds of human behavior, frees me from responsibility to emulate his or her acts—frees me ultimately from the responsibility to be moral myself. We must embrace what Michael Berenbaum, playing on Hannah Arendt’s phrase, calls the “banality of goodness”: “In the world of Auschwitz, the ordinary, commonplace behavior of the rescuers was truly extraordinary. But we cannot allow the nobility of the circumstance to obscure the routineness, the banality of the deed, nor can we allow the banality of the deed to obscure its nobility.”²³

To allow for goodness as routine—a set of possibilities no more and no less exceptional than evil—is to help open a space within which rescue behavior can take shape and grow. We must let our children know that this possibility too—the possibility of becoming, in whatever context they live, a “rescuer”—lies within them.

This task of educating-toward-rescue is not to be confused with so-called “values education” as such. Few human encounters are as ethically clear-cut as those between Nazi oppressors and Jewish victims. Parent and teachers must not confuse fostering moral agency with “teaching morals.” They must not impose values in some arbitrary manner; rather they must encourage the development of *moral agency* by challenging us to combat what Buber calls the one true evil: the evil of indifference. For according to Buber, evil is nothing but a “lack of direction,” that which emerges from an individual failing to make a decision with the whole of his or her being. Good, on the other hand, “. . . can only be done with the whole soul. It is done when the [soul] . . . seizes upon all the forces and plunges them into the purging and transmuting fire, as into the mightiness of decision. That which is done in it is done with the whole soul, so that in fact all the vigor and passion with which evil might have been done is included in it.”²⁴

Such “mightiness of decision” may appear to contradict the sense of immediacy and naturalness with which rescuers describe their moments of decision. For Buber, however, the act of goodness is no ecstatic moment, no moment outside the flow of “ordinary history”; rather, the good deed is just one example of “letting the hidden life of God shine forth”²⁵ *in the everyday world* through encountering another person in the fullness of his or her being. The bystander provides a paradigmatic instance of evil-as-indecision but the rescuer models goodness as the concentration of all one’s energies in the service of that full person-to-person meeting which Buber names “I-Thou.”

No ideology—including the “ism” of self-interest posing as “reality”—can dictate a course of behavior in advance. In facing a decision like that faced by rescuers during the Holocaust, no formula can ultimately be of help. One must wrestle with competing claims, engaging the situation with the whole of one’s being. In Buber’s words: “You are drawn by a command of justice and, your heart stirred by it, you look into the depths of a situation, there from where the contradiction looks back at you. You make present to yourself, as strongly as you possibly can, all: once again and from the ground up, what you have already known and the new, what now presents itself to be known. You do not spare yourself, you let the cruel reality of both sides inflict itself on you without reducing it.”²⁶

Education-toward-rescue encourages us to refuse our ever-present inclination toward reductionism. Instead of this evasion of true responsibility, we must foster the ability-to-respond to the other person. The witness of rescuers during the Holocaust can provide powerful assistance in the endeavor to spur such responsible behavior. It can remind us that we are not the end product of forces outside ourselves; that, ultimately, "Human beings are simultaneously more immoral and more moral than they believe."²⁷

A crucial question emerges as well-nigh inevitable in the course of this enterprise: "What would I have done had I been there?" I suggest that the extraordinary circumstances which potential rescuers faced during this period are circumstances impossible for us to grasp with the ordinary tools of cognition. Moreover, the endeavor to place oneself in Europe during the War years does more than make for highly speculative projections. To continually focus on the "What would I have done?" query is ultimately to risk having our moral sensibilities become paralyzed: *Anything I could think of doing in the name of rescue pales in the face of the deeds of the rescuers.* Just as viewing screen images of the slaughter of innocents seems to freeze our ethical sensitivities, so, too, does posing the question of hypothetical response to a call for help during the Holocaust appear to dull moral agency. In both instances a certain kind of fascination operates to "turn off" the ability to sense myself as a moral agent.

Rather than ask "What *would I have done?*" we must ask: "What *will I do?*" Here is the query to which I *can, and must*, respond with the fullness of my being. Every day we are confronted with instances of injustice which, while by no means approximating the evils of the Holocaust, nonetheless exist on a continuum with these same evils. The example of rescuers during the Holocaust is a summons teaching us to add *personal* accountability to mere *technical* accountability. The witness of rescuers calls on us no longer to avert our eyes to the murder of so many in the name of national or ethnic group self-interest, providing us with a model of resistance to indifference and indecision. In the face of an impoverished underclass, rampant homelessness, and child and drug abuse, to let a few situations stand for many more, we are called upon to become "rescuers" ourselves.

It might be argued that using the word "rescuer"—even with the qualifications noted—in some views diminishes the uniqueness of rescuer acts during the Holocaust. I would argue that by using this term not merely as a *description* of certain contemporary acts but as a *call to action* in the spirit of the rescuers of the 1940s, we do honor both to those who rescued and to those who were rescued. And more: We establish, in the conduct of our lives, a living memorial to the millions of Jews who died largely because the world stood by in silence, for bystanders, not rescuers, constituted the vast majority of peoples worldwide.

The witness of rescuers during the Holocaust thus does more than shake up our assumptions about a fundamentally self-serving human nature. Their witness inspires us to follow in the ways they lead. Rescuers help let us know that we have it within ourselves to repair the world. The concept of *tikkun olam* in Jewish thought assigns to God's creatures the task of co-creation, assuming a partnership with God in building a just world. Buber's words are instructive, as he urges us to become no less than God's fellow workers in the task of redeeming history. In this work of repairing the world, the rescuer is God's essential companion.

NOTES

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From All Their Habitations

FROM ALL THEIR HABITATIONS takes its title from Ezekiel 37:23 and features reports of Jewish religious, intellectual, and communal life in various parts of the world.

From the Ashes

ELISABETH RAAB

IT IS EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 1945, EARLY IN THE MORNING, maybe just dawn. We stand still, like frozen grey statues. Seven hundred and thirty women, wrapped in wet, grey, threadbare blankets, standing in the rain. Our blankets hang over our heads, drape down to the soil. We hold them closed with our hands from the inside, leaving only a small opening to peer out, so that we save the precious warmth of our breath. Who knows why we are here. The SS drove us out of the barracks one morning without explanation. "OUT! OUT!" was all we heard. Getting out didn't take too long since we had no belongings to pack, except for the blanket, some oily rags if we managed to steal them from the factory, a few nails and some pieces of string. I also have a nail that I'd filed down, for cleaning my fingernails (clean fingernails had become my obsession), and a piece of broken comb I had traded for a slice of bread. We hid our meager possessions just in case, like squirrels who bury trifles for some time later.

They made us line up in the usual row of five, counted us and shouted, "LOS! LOS!" (Get out! get out!) We marched off. Herded like beasts, we were marching toward Bergen-Belsen, the extermination camp, the final point of our existence.

Three days on the road, and here we stand in the rain, in the middle of a field, between the stumps of last summer's corn stalks, now turned to mush. The soil hasn't yet been able to absorb all the melted snow of the cruel winter of 1944-45. Standing there, we remain motionless for who knows how long, daring no question, expecting no answer, knowing no time.

Some time later I vaguely hear someone saying, "I noticed the SS took his Hitler picture from his pocket, crumbled it into small pieces and threw it away."

I think to myself that this must be a rumor like hundreds I have heard before. And even if it is true, they are still armed. And why would anyone save us? Who can tell what is the limit of their irrational hate? I don't believe in their clemency.

Later, it could be hours or minutes, I notice a woman not far from me, pointing to something in the distance. Suddenly she cries out in a muffled

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voice, "Oh, God, is it possible that I see a house with a white flag hanging out the window? Does that mean surrender?"

Her words spread quickly. Grey blankets slowly begin to move. First they are apprehensively pushed aside and eyes peer out. Then, when more flags appear in the distance on a cluster of houses, we become gradually convinced that something unusual is happening. We turn our eyes, still veiled by a shadow of doubt, toward the edge of the wooded area where the SS are. But they are not there. They are nowhere. Like ghosts, the SS and their dogs have vanished into thin air.

Shaking and shivering wretchedly from freedom's first sudden brush, we free our hands to reach to heaven and fall down to share our boundless relief with the earth. Hugging the wet soil, in a foe's alien land, our long-arrested pain breaks loose in tearless lumps of sobs that lie abandoned on the cold hostile ground.

The sound of distant roaring jerks us back to our feet. We listen, not knowing what to expect. The roaring approaches closer and closer. Then, in only a moment, on the main road tanks begin to appear one after another from behind the trees. A white star is marked on each one.

"The Americans! The Americans!" we scream. We run toward the tanks as fast as our limited strength and our wooden clogs will allow.

Strange prehistoric creatures move by, and with uninterrupted persistence push forward, like a mirage, making the road under our feet vibrate as we stand on the roadside watching. After the tanks come the fast-moving military trucks. Healthy young American GIs stand on them like statues of Victory. The view of them brings us hope. At first they seem surprised to see us along the roadside. Then, by impulse, they begin to empty their pockets, throwing whatever they find down to us, along with anything else at hand in the trucks. They smile kindly, waving to us as they speed by, tossing chocolates, cigarettes and gum into the air.

I catch one of those beautiful packages, gilded and sealed in foil. I hold it carefully in my hand and admire its perfection. I see in it a message from an ideal world, put together with care, especially for me. I can't understand the words written on it but I put it into my pocket with care and much anticipation. Later, when after several attempts I can't eat it, I try to decipher the writing on it again, and discover the international word "tobacco."

The passage of the army dries up after a while, and the rumble with it. In the silence we become aware of ourselves. Some of us are bewildered, some more composed, and many nervously search the terrain with apprehensive eyes. There is no limit, no wire fence. We are overwhelmed by freedom's first problem—that one can make one's own decisions. After a few undecided worried looks, half steps, and turns in all directions, most women run, picking up speed, toward the houses. We decide to follow, Hanna, Eszter, and I. We try to question some runners who we think can spare a second in the excitement and know more than we do, but only a few unclear words fly back to us in response. We see that nobody knows anything.

As we head for the village, a girl comes running, wildly gesticulating, shouting that she knows where the SS supply cart is, because she was pushing it when they disappeared. There is bread and other food on it, but she needs help.

We recognize a great opportunity to get something to eat, and join her at the cart a few kilometers back. We eat some of the bread, as much as our shrunken stomachs can take, and then struggle to push and pull the cart towards the village. When we arrive there we are immediately surrounded by girls claiming its contents. "This is ours, too," they argue, while picking the cart clean.

Hanna, Eszter, and I walk dazedly down the main street of a town we never planned to see. We stumble, puzzled and vulnerable, hoping secretly, if they are watching, for some understanding. We are like children marveling over something, seeing it for the first time—and seeing ourselves for the first time, too. The further we go, the more we want to see. We want to see behind the closed doors, behind the snow-white ruffled curtains covering the sparkling windows. We want to see into the church with its kneeling worshippers, inside the schoolyard with children playing, the conscientious people who take care of the flowers in the front yards. We want to know what they think when they see us. Who prays in the church? Whose children go to school? Who lives in the meticulous houses? But no one is about. Not a soul is out. Insecure? Or too proud? But we are proud, too. We know without saying it that each of us remembers the civilized world in which our friendships started, and that obliges us to act in a civilized manner, even under the present boundless, anarchic conditions.

As we trudge to the middle of the town, we come to a two-story building. *Gasthaus* is written on it. I presume they have a washroom, and decide spontaneously to go there. Though I am frightened, I finally put my hand on the doorknob and open it. Then I stop. Normal, healthy-looking people are at the tables, eating their meals. At first it is inconceivable. Maybe the uncertainty of the surrender made them flock here, all so well dressed. Not knowing what else to do, I go up to the person at the counter and ask, in her own language, where the washroom is. She points to the corridor. I cross the room uneasily, aware that I am being followed by stiff, frozen glances. They seem to be saying, "How does she dare?" but I can't do anything except stiffen my shoulders and march through.

On my way out of the washroom I pass the kitchen and I step in because the door is open and no one is inside. I look around and notice a big pot on the counter. I haven't seen a pot in a kitchen for such a long time. When I bend over it, the intoxicating aroma of fresh milk rises up like a drug. On impulse I just pick up the entire pot and take it with me, leaving by the back door. I hurry around to the street, where my friends are waiting for information about my first washroom. My brazen action triggers a cold dizzy shiver through me. Is it me? I, who did that?

Seeing me coming back with the big pot, my friends ask, "What's that?" We all drink the milk straight from the pot.

Later we three sit on the street corner for a while just watching the unusual bustle. We sit there as an audience, unable to take up a role yet, but admiring those who can. Girls are running from house to house in their unkempt greasy overalls and wooden clogs. Some are carrying arms full of goods, mostly clothes, and some have impatiently pulled dresses right over their dirty outfits. We see expensive furs flung on top of oil-drenched overalls.

Then we look into houses where the most audacious girls have already settled. Finding the doors open, they have simply walked in. They discover the food warming on stoves, and the tables set for the festive Easter meal. Assuming the owners have gone into last-minute hiding close by, the girls simply lock the doors from inside so no one else—not even others from our group—can intrude, and make themselves at home. As we linger watching, we see one group having a relaxed bath in the washing trough in the middle of someone's kitchen.

Eventually my two friends and I find ourselves back on the highway where we saw the American tanks. Other prisoners are also on the streets, emerging from somewhere, heading somewhere, without any fixed goal. They smile, and we respond with the knowing smile of solidarity. And we all stop as if for a long conversation. But we say aloud only the two words, "DEUTSCHLAND KAPUTT!" And they answer, "DEUTSCHLAND KAPUTT!" Because we all speak different languages. We don't understand each other. We say good-bye, a ready smile on our lips, but our eyes are not so ready. The chased, hungry, bewildered look has not disappeared. We repeat it over and over again to ex-prisoners on the move. Often we return the Russian salute, "Zdravstvuite," which we learn instantly. All these people, like us, have been dumped here from every corner of Europe, speaking only their own tongue. Our communication with them is sign language or the few broken German words we have all picked up in the camps. But for now "DEUTSCHLAND KAPUTT!" is enough. It says it all.

We take lightly the American patrol's warning, "The front is not secure yet. The Germans can still come back." After not even a full day of freedom, we don't believe that it would be possible. Could fate possibly repeat itself a second time? Rerun the same bad play?

As the day passes, we look for accommodation, and by opening an unlocked door facing the sidewalk, we chance upon a place that is perfectly appropriate. It is a large empty hall with a stage at one end that looks as if it might have been a cultural meeting center for Nazis. We move in with seven other girls, making ten in all. Our two rows of five from camp are kept intact. We feel more comfortable with each other than with any others.

Leaving the door ajar, we search for a corner to lie down. Habit dictates that our whole group be within reach. The cover is our grey blanket and anyone who has stolen oil rags rolls them up for a pillow. Locking the door doesn't even enter our minds.

Exuberant French singing wakes us the next morning. Stunned, we sit up and look at the stage. We become even more puzzled at seeing a group of men who look like ex-prisoners, singing away while dancing on one leg, trying to

put their trousers on. None of us heard them arrive during the night. It seems they stopped here by chance on their way to somewhere. Maybe home. Then they disappear as quickly as they arrived, leaving behind a spirit of cheerful revelry. It is as quick as a glance at a picture, but their energetic singing and uninhibited movements awake and liberate a hidden connection in us. They give us a small jolt toward life, a reminder that a real world exists beyond the boundaries of Germany.

We start to stir with more heart, thinking for the first time about what comes next. Then, by instinct rather than planning, we agree to look immediately for more permanent lodging. Since we sleep in our clothes and we know how to live without washing, there is nothing to hold us back. We leave the hall promptly, each of us going her separate way to sample freedom independently, without even a friend's influence.

I wander between the houses, not knowing who I am, or what I am looking for, or what on earth I am doing here. I stray into a cottage occupied by a group of girls. I walk around by myself inside, in a no-man's land. No one gives me so much as a glance as I admire the beds, the dainty bedspread, the dressing table, the curtains, the mirror. I am face to face with myself, but I refuse to believe that the face gazing back from the mirror is mine. The last time I saw myself, my cropped head, was in a piece of broken glass in Auschwitz. The bedroom reflects back memories that rise slowly to the surface; memories of a warm home, a respectful household. Ironically, I reflect that just a day ago those rooms were someone's home, before the upheaval created by these tattered girls. I can relate clearly to the owner's state of mind in leaving it behind.

The girls are good-hearted and nice to me; they let me lie down for a nap, though their lodging is already filled. Only a crib is available. I climb in and fall asleep as soon as I curl up on the heavenly soft mattress. I have hardly started my cozy sleep when I wake with the feeling that someone is observing me. Lifting my head for a groggy gaze, I find myself staring at the most wonderful set of white teeth I have ever seen. It takes me a while to recognize and take in the whole picture of the owner of the benevolent grin, a black GI, who looks amused at the big baby in the crib. My awkward explanation, without the necessary words, is also a grin.

Impressed by the first encounter in my life with a black person, I remain propped up on my elbow, stunned. This encounter couldn't have happened to me before, in Middle-Europe, in Hungary. And what is more striking is that it happened just like that, so naturally: he simply walked in. The strangeness touches me, the strange change in which I find myself a player and which I now witness has just begun. It becomes suddenly clear. The first brush of a new culture. What a difference if a European uniformed soldier had walked in. What airs he would have manifested. The Americans in Europe. I am immensely proud of them, also very frightened by their newness. I am not sure. I am looking for the old Europe from before the war, to find my previous place. I just want to pick up where I left it. I also know that here is a change that can't be undone. Will I be able to understand their

easy smile? Will they be able to understand heavy-handed Europe with their American eyes?

Later, I watch the girls concocting a meal from reserves found in the pantry. They let me have some too, so I prepare to wash up the dishes in return. They look at me as though I've gone crazy. They take the plates away from me, open the window and simply fling the plates out of the second floor. "This is our dishwashing," they tell me. "Didn't they rob ours?"

"Yes, they did," I reply, but secretly the revenge scares me. I am frightened by anarchy without social norms. I walk away without so much as a good-bye.

On our third day in town, the German inhabitants are still in hiding. Only those living further out have stayed in their dwellings. It is in one of these homes that we eventually seek accommodation. We decide to approach the farmer's wife for a room. Apparently, she doesn't dare to refuse, so all ten of us move in. No doubt, judging by family members' furtive looks, they are worried, not knowing what kind of fugitives they are bound to let in.

The narrow room they provide gets crowded with all of us inside. When we stretch out for the night we cover the whole surface of the floor. Even the door gets blocked, but we don't mind the scarcity of space. Closing our own door behind us makes us feel cheerful, as if something decent and civilized has come our way.

The next day, the early morning sunshine filters through our narrow window from the farmer's fields. The first day I stay around the farm, privileged by my new existence—the garden, the space, the freshly ploughed fields, the budded fruit trees, the red-crested white rooster in the yard. The blond, rosy-cheeked farmer's wife rushes about, her chin pushed downward, eluding my glance. I can't guess what her thoughts are as she struggles to look indifferent, ignoring my presence. Her small children are teasing each other, rolling in the grass, as if I were not there.

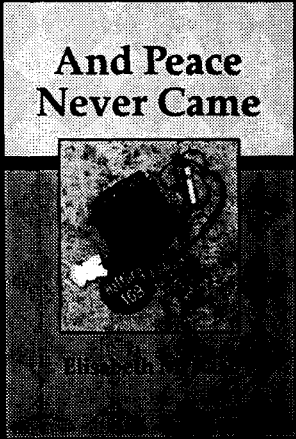
Everyone except me walks to town, arriving, as they later tell me, when food is being distributed. American army supplies are given out by soldiers not prepared yet for our sudden appearance. Included is a big, white, square, fluffy thing like a cake. The bread. The girls also bring back sugar, margarine and Nescafe. For boiling our water we have the pot I took from the *Gasthaus*. Cups appear from somewhere. The first supper in our new household is bread and margarine topped with sugar, and the Nescafe. It tastes like food, it is like a feast. It isn't even spoiled by knowing that the door that leads to the kitchen, and from there to the anteroom, has been locked for the night by the German family. Our window is the only way out.

Then we spread our rags out on the floor, preparing our spots for the night. I lie down as we all do, but I toss and turn for hours. Finally unable to remain on the floor any longer, I step carefully over the girls on the floor and head towards the window. In the pitch dark I climb out and go around to the back of the house, to the outdoor toilet. Then I climb back in quietly and lie down again.

Still I can't fall asleep. I sit up wondering what else I can do for the rest of the night, only to see two of the other girls sitting on the windowsill riding-

fashion, each heading in a different direction, crossing the sill with different purpose. One is going out, the other is coming in. When the three of us notice each other we can't silence our giggles. Then everybody props themselves up for a sleepy look and suddenly the room becomes as busy as a beehive, everybody jumping out of their rags and heading towards the window, relieved because no one else could sleep. For the remainder of the night there is always someone on the move towards the window or through it. The exodus goes on till morning, amid witty remarks and laughter. Everybody joins in the unexpected party, only interrupted occasionally by an audible, "Keep quiet. I want to sleep." But the endless laughter goes on uncontrollably; we behave as though we are totally drunk.

As silly as it was, the night's laughter proves a useful bridge to relaxed interaction between us the next day. It also helps us to learn again how to enjoy easy camaraderie. It is the first remembrance of the old life. We also get wiser, learning that coffee is like a narcotic in our fragile condition. We don't know ourselves how weak we are.



And Peace Never Came

Elisabeth M. Raab

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206 pp. with 12 b/w photos; map

Raab paints a brief yet moving picture of her idyllic life before her internment and the shock and the horrors of Auschwitz, but it is in the images of life after her liberation that Raab imparts her most poignant story—a story told in a clear, almost sparse, always honest style, a story of the brutal, and, at times, the beautiful facts of human nature.

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Reviews

Radical Mysticism

Seek My Face, Speak My Name: A Contemporary Theology. By ARTHUR GREEN. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1992. \$29.95.

Reviewed by ARNOLD JACOB WOLF

Last year when I was telling the story of Abraham breaking his father's idols, a young child in our school burst into tears. "Abraham shouldn't have done that," he said. "Idols are wonderful. We have some in our own living room." It turned out that the child's father was a Hindu and that, as the young boy correctly pointed out, the family "venerated" images of Krishna. In discussing the situation within the family, they insisted that they all knew that there was only one God but insisted that God could be experienced in the many forms of Indian religious sensibility. I wished with all my heart that Arthur Green would have been there with me. He, I imagined, would have had something welcoming and ecumenical to say to that family, while all I could think of was: "*avodah zarah*," pagan idolatry!

I have the same ambivalent view of Green's exciting and masterful new book, the most original theological writing by an American Jew since the high-tide of covenantal theology, a movement summarized superbly last year by Eugene B. Borowitz's mature work, *Renewing the Covenant*. Green is far beyond where we older Jewish thinkers were willing or able to go. He may go too far beyond to be finally very convincing or helpful. His narrative, confessional theology has the virtues of the genre, but also the defects pointed out by Michael Goldberg. He is powerfully influenced not only by Hasidism and Moshe Idel but also by Hegelian notions of imma-

nence which have the hazards that Steven Schwarzschild described in his essay on "The Lure of Immanence" to be found in Kellner's collection of his works called *The Pursuit of the Ideal*. The key problem is that the world and God are identified and that what is, is equated with what should or must be, with a corresponding deemphasis on messianic ethics and personal responsibility, a lack that Green tries powerfully to remedy by *obiter dicta* on equality, ecology, study, and patience.

Theology is, for Green, an extrapolation of personal experience. What else could it be? Against his master, Abraham Joshua Heschel, who claimed that Judaism knew nothing of symbols, Green asserts that Jewish religious thinking is precisely the analysis of religious symbols and not of putative truth-claims. It is a "great circular journey back to the origins where beginning and end are joined together" (p. xxv). Shades of Mircea Eliade!

The key discovery for Green, as with all true mystics, is that "nothing but the One exists" (p. 6) and that God is the all in all, manifesting Itself in and through the world. "Religious experience is largely the experience of immanence," he asserts, though phenomenological students of religion since Rudolph Otto and Gerardus Van Der Leeuw, have thought quite the reverse. But, if everything is God, if the King and the kingdom are one, if God must be found only horizontally and not vertically, here and not elsewhere, in the world as it is and not in the world as it is to be ethically constructed, then of course "we find God by turning into ourselves" (p. 13). I myself, would hate to believe that God inheres principally in that

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confused and incoherent person that I imagine to be myself: Green is far more sanguine than I.

"It is time for Jewish non-dualism to emerge from hiding" and to admit that the Kabbalists were right when they refused to separate the any from the All, when they proclaimed, "There is naught but You" (p. 16). This God is "process without end," though also, somehow, unchanging and One. In any case, God is the closest and nearest to our own selves and that is where we must search God out.

We can know God's name, that is, God's person-hood, "bridging abstraction and intimacy in a single movement of the spirit" (p. 22). While God may well be the Holy Nothingness that Richard Rubenstein excavated prematurely from Kabbalah, for our own sanity we must clothe the Naught in personhood and give God a Name, a Name which otherwise God would not have. Through intimate contact with other human persons, by imaging God in projections of our own and others' needs, we can reach out to the divine mystery. Like his teacher, Abraham Heschel, at least here, Green insists that the human being is the true image of God, the only picture in which to find the likeness of the Hidden One. "We are created in the image of God, if you will, and we are obliged to return the favor" (p. 32). What is this "if you will"? What kind of quasi-Feuerbachian reversal permits Green to assert that we have made our God only in the image of ourselves? If, for him, God is "both male and female" (p. 40) most of us would hold that God is neither of the two. Nor are we comfortable with the notion that we human beings are God's "face." But it is precisely because most of the older generation would be uncomfortable with this heterodox the-

ology, that it is so important, so truly original and so very close to unique. What good would another book by one of us *mitnagdim* be compared to this breakthrough into philosophic mysticism? Green's God is not mine—perhaps, so much the worse for me.

Green's doctrine of creation is, as expected, influenced heavily by Kabbalistic notions of *tsimtsum* and *hitpashtut*, roughly, the contraction and overflowing of deity to make a world. (He notes that some present-day theorists of the big bang are apparently drawn to images like these.) We modern Jews do not "believe" the six-day story of beginnings in Genesis 1, but we "affirm" creation as "the greatest of all religious dramas" (p. 54). One way of describing how the world was made by/out of God is the neo-platonic theory of emanation which has always appealed to mystics. It implies that the world is a derivative of God, not wholly or purely distinct, that the separation of being is only a "necessary illusion."

For some reason, Green derives his halakhic system from the doctrine of creation, not from revelation. This seems to me a serious mistake with implications that undermine the very possibility of religious law. But since, for him, *halakha* can emerge only from *aggadah* (theological narrative), it can hardly be called revealed in any ordinary traditional sense. In any case, Green lists four *mitsvot*, commandments, which all modern Jews are to obey:

1. Be aware! Our consciousness of mystery is the root of all our obligation.
2. Treat every human being as the image of God.
3. Observe Shabbat as "contemplation turned into a way of living" (p.82).

4. Guard creation itself. For Green, the ecological task necessarily entails vegetarianism, what a much earlier Reconstructionist once called "twentieth century *kashrut*." That seems right to me.

There is certainly nothing objectionable about these four *mitsvot*, but they appear almost anti-climactic after a huge introductory description of creation as the mysterious inner discrimination of the Godhead. Alternative Jewish interpretations of scientific creation by Samuelson, Novak, and Kogan may appeal more than his to those who are more interested than I am in correlations between cosmologies.

Revelation, for Green, is "the One become word in the human mind" (p. 101), rather than any event that "occurs" between us and God. It privileges no unique text and no single moment or person, like Sinai or Moses or Torah. In this, Green reveals himself as a quintessential Reconstructionist for whom the whole of (Jewish) existence is (equally?) valuable and persuasive. There is no mechanism for internal criticism which the Jewish neo-Kantians, for example, carried to artistic heights, though via an instructive inconsistency.

One of Green's most brilliant interpretations is his description of the Sinai pericope in Exodus 19. Showing how vague and, perhaps purposely, obscure, is its narration of the giving of the Torah, and, drawing on some medieval commentators' daring interpretations, Green sees in the chapter an awesome thunder of divinity, which Moses, not God, turns into words and meanings. Only Moses' voice was heard at Sinai; God is voiceless, so human speech is, in the end, the only possible source of revelation. "All God says is

that which cannot be spoken" (p. 117), Rosenzweig's letter aleph again.

Indeed, Sinai is a symbol of every authentic human journey undertaken sincerely. The commandments are, as Mordecai Kaplan said they were, *sancta* (one must not say: "mere *sancta*"). Green admits, no, rather asserts, without qualm, "I do not know a God who commands" (p. 128). It is we humans who create holiness as we create *halakha*. I am always reminded by those who insist on human independence and on our perfect autonomy, of a wonderful old New Yorker cartoon describing a progressive nursery school, in which one of the children raises her hand and asks: "Teacher, do we have to do what we want to do?" Green's answer is an unqualified "yes," though what we want to do will, of course, be determined by what we are. He is himself a Jew who will "choose to remain at home" (p. 134). I would say, on the contrary, that I choose to have no choice in the matter. Green would command no one's conscience; I feel commanded by family, by community, by my super ego, yes, even by God, all of the time. His Sinai is a "homecoming." My homecoming is a return to revelation, God's attempt to reach me and not just my own feeble attempts to reach deeper into myself, a shaky self which is always under construction.

Redemption, for Green, is also a kind of homecoming, an act of *t'shuvah*, a returning to our roots in the sacred Oneness of the All. It constitutes a coming-back "to the Source of our own inner light" (p. 153) defying, but never denying, absurdity. It is a return to YHWH, the ineffable name of God, and serves as a rhetorical framework which, however, does not communicate to me anything beyond the utter impossibility of saying, much less utilizing, the Name of God.

Redemption is also a coming home to earth, to Jerusalem (for Jews?), both earthly and heavenly Jerusalem, to the Land of Israel, to the human heart, to male and female (!), to Eden, "that ideal child within us" (p. 162). I should have thought that I was barred forever from returning to the infantilizing garden of the id, that however much I might fantasize complete regression, I am constrained by a God-given reality principle, if by nothing else, to shape up and grow up, farther and farther from Eden. Mysticism may be a spiritualized version of messianic narcissism. In this kind of God all fantasies are finally permissible and all our dreams come true.

It is, however, we who must "redeem the Messiah" (p. 187), who must unify creation and even God Itself. Upon us all depends, with us all becomes possible. The book concludes on a note of profound optimism; how dearly that hope is bought each reader must discover for herself.

Rabbi Green hardly discusses the holocaust or Israel, evil or intermarriage. Why should one choose to be Jewish or "do" Jewish unless one wants to? Green's relentless privatization of decision-making renders Jewish community almost invisible, and obedience incongruous. Though Arnold Eisen has predicted that Green represents the future of Jewish theology in America, I suggest that more useful guidance will come from more conventional resources and spokespersons.

Nevertheless, Arthur Green's groundbreaking book, his "heterodox mystical theology of Judaism" (p. 127) constitutes a brave new chapter in American Jewish thought. All previous American thinkers have been forced to respond to questions posed by Mordecai Kaplan, and, in one sense, all the answers have been varieties of post-Or-

thodox Reconstructionism. Green brings together Kaplan and Rav Kook (himself a crypto-pantheist) and the pre-dialogical Martin Buber, the very Buber rejected by Buber himself (for good reason), but now rehabilitated by Green. I fear Arthur Green sometimes misreads his teacher Abraham Heschel. In my view, Heschel's *Torah Min Hashamayim* (now in three volumes) is a masterpiece of dialogical thinking, which Green reduces to a humanist-mystical monochrome (see p. 177). Heschel balanced the anthropocentric and transcendental in Judaism; Green unifies them prematurely by blurring necessary if also subtle distinctions.

Seek My Face, Speak My Name is homiletically and imaginatively rhetorical, no insult from those of us who see the preacher's role as crucial to Jewish renewal, but unsettling to those who might want a more philosophically rigorous analysis. I do not, for example, agree with Green that Buber and Rosenzweig "both tend toward mysticism in their discussions of revelation" (p. 232). Quite the opposite. They tend to become old-fashioned Cohennian rationalists when ethical issues are at stake; they have no choice.

Green has learned a great deal from Hasidism, whose superb student and interpreter he is, from Scholem and Idel, from Kabbalah and modern pantheism. And from the genius of Reb Zalman Schachter, whose name is strangely missing from Green's list of sources, and from Michael Wyschogrod, whose name he continually misspells.

This book will be read, discussed, and misrepresented for many years to come. Green's very open-mindedness leaves him open to misreading, perhaps even encourages it. I am grateful to him for an honest and deeply learned and original presentation of a view I find finally

uncongenial, but which many other readers will not. I cannot get over my near certainty that I am, in no sense at all, God, and I do not want to. Others may, however.

I do not believe we will be saved by what Franz Rosenzweig once called "aggadic doing"; Green does. I hope against hope and against all reason, that he is right.



How Jewish Was Weimar Jewry?

The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany. By MICHAEL BRENNER. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

Unspoken Bequest: The Contribution of German Jews to German Culture. By HUGO MUNSTERBERG. Olive Bridge, NY: Raymond Saroff, 1995.

Reviewed by ALAN LEVENSON

Hitler's thousand-year Reich lasted twelve years, a shorter time than the Weimar Republic which preceded it. Yet a glance at the German history section of any American bookstore suggests an unending fascination with the Nazi dictatorship, and a relative lack of interest in the era that Peter Gay hopelessly described as "already a legend" in his seminal study, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*. This disparity offers a corrective to the historian Leopold von Ranke's view that "all ages stand in immediate relationship to God." Perhaps, but apparently, those ages which stand in immediate relationship to the Devil sell better.

The Jews represented one of the few groups that wholeheartedly supported the generally unloved Weimar Republic. For Jews, Weimar represented the culmination of a lengthy struggle for equal opportunity in all areas of German life. Although Jews had achieved political Emancipation throughout the German Empire (the *Kaiserreich*) in 1871, that putative equality was compromised

in many areas. Placement and promotion in the civil service, the university, the public school system and the army were either stymied or slowed for professing Jews. The various German ministries displayed suspicious hostility toward the Jewish minority in a wide variety of social arenas, including even the right of baptized Jews to choose names of their own devising.¹ Furthermore, the domination of various coalitions of the right from 1879 onwards guaranteed that Jews would remain in opposition politically. Although the cultural flowers that would bloom during the Weimar Period were already growing before the war, the stifling atmosphere of Prussian Junkerdom kept these accomplishments in check.

Imperial Germany's collapse, the abdication of Wilhelm II, and the proclamation of the Republic on 9 November 1918 by Philipp Scheidemann of the Socialist Party, promised a new era. The two books reviewed here show how successfully German Jews took advantage of Weimar's promise and serve as worthy bookends to the historiographical question: what was the German-Jewish contribution to German culture—and did that contribution also extend into the realm of Judaic life?

Hugo Munsterberg's *Unspoken Bequest* is not a scholarly exploration, but a tribute to the galaxy of German Jewish accomplishments from philosophy and

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religious thought to the hard and social sciences. While not limited to the Weimar period, a remarkable number of the subjects of his thumb-nail sketches made their signal contributions during the Republic. By lumping together without much comment the intensely varied Jewishness of his subjects, Munsterberg inadvertently highlights an old conundrum: what was it about Jewishness that made German Jews so productive? How, for instance, can the "Jewishness" of Karl Marx, baptized a youth and without Judaic knowledge; the "Jewishness" of the psychologist Erich Fromm, raised in a traditional home in Frankfurt-am-Main; and the "Jewishness" of the chemist Fritz Haber, who had himself baptized as a grown man in a very different climate than Marx, all be offered as a single historical factor? From John Murray Cuddihy's *The Ordeal of Civility* to Paul Mendes Flohr's *Divided Passions*, attempts have been made to find the Archimedean standpoint, but, as yet, no single solution satisfies.

Another curious and inadvertent feature of Munsterberg's work, is that his figures seem to operate in a vacuum. The interaction between these figures and the movements to which they contributed, Lassalle and Socialism, for instance, is lacking, and the interaction of these German Jews with similarly committed gentiles, certainly an appropriate theme given the nature of Munsterberg's work, is eerily absent. Gentiles appear in these pages mainly as sidekicks (Marx's Friedrich Engels) or admirers (Walther Rathenau's Harry Kessler). To cite the praises of Einstein by Alfred North Whitehead is fine: to discuss the revolution in physics in that period, to which Einstein was one of several stellar contributors, would have been far better testimony to a German Jewish symbiosis.

Finally, one may question the purpose of this filiopietistic work. The tone

throughout is not only reverential but apologetic, yet it is hard to determine for whom the apologia is intended. Contemporary Germany is willing—perhaps over-eager—to claim past Jewish contributions. American Jewry chants Marx, Freud, and Einstein as one of its favorite mantras, and non-Jews do not dismiss Erich Mendelssohn's work as "Jewish architecture." While there is little need to defend the contributions of Jews to general culture, if we are looking for a defense of the *Judaic* quality of the German-Jewish experience, the reader is advised to turn to Michael Brenner's book.

Brenner's *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* should put to rest any notion of the lack of interest of German Jews in their own Judaism. In the area of popularizing the findings of the "Science of Judaism," and in the development of secular expressions of Jewishness in music, literature, and the plastic arts, even in bourgeois pursuits such as Jewish bibliophilism, Brenner shows that on both institutional and individual levels a modern, secular-tending German Jewish culture was very much alive and well. In the search for alternative models of Jewish authenticity, whether in the Oriental Jew of the past or of the Eastern European Jew of the interwar years, German Jews displayed their vaunted self-critical tendencies to the fullest. Carefully stating his views about the range of this "renaissance," Brenner tells us that just as American Jews seem to be bifurcating into the indifferent and the increasingly committed, so too the Jews of Weimar.

The chapter on the *Lehrhaus* movement is a tour de force. Using a wide range of archives, interviews, private letters, and published material, Brenner provides a fascinating weave of ideological and institutional concerns. Who would have thought that the new-thinking, erstwhile Hegelian Franz

Rosenzweig was also a master at marketing and public relations? Who really appreciated the debt that the Lehrhaus movement owed to the German *Volkshochschule*, or the way in which this German adult education movement and the traditional beit *midrash* could yield a meaningful synthesis? Brenner reminds us that numbers matter too; during the six years of its existence, the Frankfurt Lehrhaus enrollment figures approached 1,100 students per semester in a Jewish community of 27,000.² Frankfurt, of course, was an especially Jewish place, but “adult education institutions existed in seven of the ten largest Jewish communities in Germany” (90).

In contrast to Steven Aschheim’s work on the highly ambivalent constructions of the *Ostjude* (East European Jew), Brenner points to the artistic achievements of Jakob Wasserman, Else Lasker-Schüler, Sammy Gronemann, and Isaac Breuer as “the invention of the authentic Jew.”³ Brenner’s study also places the German-Ostjude encounter in a social context, discussing the transformative personal encounters (e.g., Salman Schocken and Shmuel Yosef Agnon), the creation of a Hebrew-speaking circle in Berlin (e.g., the Cafe Monopole crowd), and the general recognition of Hebrew and Yiddish as linguistic vehicles of Jewish authenticity. Not surprisingly, the more Judaically demanding, the more limited the circle of the involved. Several hundred Mannheim Jews turned out to hear 250 of their co-religionists perform a Hanukkah extravaganza, *Licht und Volk*; Schocken publications enjoyed widespread book sales. Yet Brenner candidly reveals the nature and limits of the renaissance in his epilogue: “In the Weimar period, like a generation before, most German Jews knew no Hebrew and had a rather superficial knowledge of traditional Jewish texts. But in contrast to their parents

and grandparents, who were often ashamed of their remaining connections to traditional Judaism, an increasing number of German Jews felt ashamed of knowing so little” (220).

Despite Brenner’s unquestioned mastery of the German context, his is clearly also a contribution in Jewish history. At every point, Brenner’s book looks inward, and one wonders if a general reader of German history would find much here that is illuminating.

Neither Brenner nor Munsterberg grapple with the issue of whether the modernism, urbanism, and the prominence of the “outsider as insider” are what made the Republic “Jewish,” as anti-Semites and anti-Republicans maintained. In the recently published *Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, the editors, Martin Jay, Anton Kaes, and Edward Dimendberg, handle this issue differently: while containing selections on “the Jewish Community” in the section “Pressure Points of Social Life,” Jewish authors appear on a variety of points touching the general German scene. Similarly, in Dagmar Herzog’s recent *Intimacy and Exclusion*, we see the merits of studying not only the Jewish adaptation of German culture, but the interpenetration of majority and minority cultures, and the ways in which Jewish matters get implicated in larger issues.⁴ But this is quibbling; no monograph can do everything and Brenner’s framing of the nature of Jewish culture in Weimar is accomplishment enough for one book.

To close on a biographical note, it is surely no coincidence that the late Hugo Munsterberg, who spent his childhood and adolescence in the Weimar Republic, and went on to become a distinguished art historian, represents just the sort of contribution made by German Jews to all fields of culture that his book illuminates. Michael Brenner, two generations younger than Munsterberg,

grew up in the German Federal Republic, has witnessed the (limited) reinvigoration of Jewish culture and chooses to focus on the abiding Jewishness of at least some of Weimar's Jews. Despite Brenner's carefully honed brief, I was struck by how ephemeral the Weimar renaissance was. Brenner's work underscores the abiding difficulty of sustaining a Jewish renaissance in a highly secularized atmosphere. On a different note, despite the intentions of these authors, the air of tragedy that hovers over the German Jewish experience has not—maybe cannot—be entirely dispelled. Just stroll down the German history aisle at your local bookstore.

Assimilated, Acculturated, or Affirming: The Jewish Detective in America

American Judaism in Transition. By GERHARD FALK. Latham, MD: University Press of America, 1995.

Justice. By FAYE KELLERMAN. New York: William and Morrow, 1995.

The Day the Rabbi Left Town. By HARRY KEMELMAN. New York: Fawcett, 1996.

Reviewed by LAWRENCE W. RAPHAEL

In his recent book, Gerhard Falk notes that "Now, three generations after the Holocaust and five generations after the mass migrations from Eastern Europe, Judaism has reached the outer limits of secularization and therefore must return to tradition if it is to survive. It is the contention of this author that American Jews are doing just that now" (257).

Falk tries to make a convincing argument in terms of the sociological analysis of secularization and American religious

NOTES

1. Dietz Bering's classic study has recently been translated into English as *The Stigma of Names: Antisemitism in German Daily Life, 1812-1933* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).
2. To get a picture of what the 26,000 Frankfurt Jews who did *not* attend the Lehrhaus were up to, see Donald Niewyk's *The Jews in Weimar Germany* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980).
3. Steven Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).
4. Dagmar Herzog, *Intimacy and Exclusion: Religious Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Baden* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

life. When he analyzes the institutions of religious life, education, and the family, he makes a convincing case. Noting that secularization refers to the decline of religion as a coherent identifiable system of beliefs and practices, Falk brings a considerable amount of evidence to bear on the decline of the impact of Judaism on most Americans today.

I am deeply moved by the passion of Falk as he attempts to catalogue the disastrous path on which universalist, secular liberalism has taken the American Jewish community. The wealth of statistical and qualitative data that he has collected to support his analysis of contemporary Jewry is most useful. Nevertheless, his critique of the *B'nai Mitzvah* phenomenon in synagogue life, for example, leaves me doubting his objectivity.

Even though I am a Reform rabbi, I am still not as convinced as Falk seems to

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be that Reform is the answer to secularization. Falk claims that: "this recognition [by Reform Jews of a return to Jewish traditions] may well be the saving grace of Judaism in the twenty-first century." Once this "trend has been well recognized and experienced by that great army of secular Jews who do not attend any synagogue ever, who do not participate in the life of the Jewish people in any way but who still see themselves as Jews because of their memories, that great number will yet return to Judaism and its ancestral roots" (357).

Falk does note in other places in this uneven volume that the problems are more complicated and the possible solutions to increased secularization more problematic. Indeed, the American Jewish population material collected and published several years ago by the Council of Jewish Federations makes it clear that the magnitude and diversity of the American Jewish community makes any single analysis of the problem quite difficult.

One complex example is the illustration of how the intermarriage pattern among American Jews has a great deal to do with the secularization of Judaism. As noted by Barry Kosman (*Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Study*, Council of Jewish Federations, 1991, p. 18) in 1990, 68 percent of all married Jews then in the United States were married to a non-Jew. Of the 32 percent married to Jews, four percent were married to a "Jew by choice." These statistics include persons of all ages. During the years beginning with 1985, however, Jews began to marry non-Jews in much greater numbers. Over fifty percent of all Jewish marriages since 1985 have been with a non-Jew and twice as many mixed couples have been created among American Jews. Furthermore, "those who are intermarried but remain within Judaism

seldom opt for such stringent observances as synagogue participation, the holiday rituals, and the maintenance of the food laws [*kashrut*]. Instead, intermarried persons are more likely to assume Jewish ethnicity but not Jewish religiosity" (Falk, 233).

Most would agree with Falk's interpretation of the intermarriage statistics, claiming that secularization has led to family alienation, conflict, and disintegration of the Jewish family in America (Falk, 243). Others might argue that the enormous cultural changes that most families in America have undergone have been the cause and not the symptom of patterns of exogamy, dissolution of the extended family, and the diminution of the role of religion in contemporary life.

At the same time, the resurgence of modern orthodoxy in many parts of the country has suggested that the forces of secularization have influenced groups in different ways. While those traditional Jewish groups which practice their religion within the context of an open society can be distinguished from the extreme orthodox and Hasidim, their response to modernity has taken many forms. The role of women, the influence of secular education (especially college and university), work, and the response to changing social and political systems have all influenced this aspect of Jewish life.

The analyses of historians and social scientists demand the insights of the creative arts. High culture continues to receive the attention it deserves; nevertheless, the popular artist also has something to offer; popular fiction, especially the detective novel, is worth looking at for its insights. Here in the arena of one of the most popular genres of contemporary literature a revealing experience is being played out.

Mystery readers of any of the sub-genres (mysteries about sports, animals,

foreign locales, British cozies, to name a few), as well as those who read any mysteries, know that this experience is not just escapist reading. If you want to learn about the expectations and the synagogue politics of the Jewish community, take a walk with one of the "Rabbis." If you are interested in the modern police departments, then you can squeeze into the unmarked cars with one of the Lieutenants. If you are interested in Jews in contemporary music and pop culture, then try to keep up with Kinky Friedman. If you want to spend time with a single Jewish female attorney who anguishes over her career, her love life, her search for decent Chinese food, her relationship with her mother and what the upper westside of Manhattan has become, then you want to hunt down murderers with Nina Fischman. If you are fascinated by the seductive pull of Jewish crime bosses, you must tag along with the journalist William Goldin.

While the Jewish protagonist is part of dozens and dozens of mystery novels, he or she is almost always highly assimilated and often intermarried. Many of these assimilated Jewish detectives express their identity only in cultural and ethnic forms. Surprisingly, however, it is those few Jewish characters by contrast who are clearly identified as Jews, and who utilize Jewish tradition, law, or custom to advance the plot, that are the most popular. Since 1986 there have been more than 125 Jewish detective novels published. They can be divided roughly into three categories: Assimilated, Acculturated, and Affirmed. Examples of the first category (the largest in number) include a Boston private eye and taxi cab driver—Carlotta Carlyle in the novels of Linda Barnes, and a Chicago sportscaster solving grisly murders—Andy Sussman in the novels of Michael Katz.

The second category of Acculturated includes a New York City policeman who retires to become a private investigator—Shelly Lowenkopf in the novels of Richard Fliegel, and a Boston children's book artist—Calista Jacobs in the novels of Kathryn Lasky Knight. Both of these characters, and many more like them, struggle with their own and their family's sense of Jewish identity which sometimes serves to advance the plot.

The third, and smallest, category of Affirmative Jewish protagonists are the province of Faye Kellerman and Harry Kemelman, and also includes a low-keyed and complicated Chicago policeman—Abe Lieberman in the novels of Stuart Kaminsky, and a First Amendment lawyer who struggles with who he is as a Jew as he defends anti-Semites and murderers—Nate Rosen in the novels of Ronald Levitsky. This handful of Jewish mystery writers have merged their interest in solving a crime with their desire to illuminate some aspect of traditional Judaism and the Jewish community. Kellerman and Kemelman, who have been on national bestseller lists, each published their most recent novel during the past year.

Harry Kemelman, probably the originator of the religious contemporary Jewish detective, introduced us to Rabbi David Small with *Friday the Rabbi Slept Late*, in 1964. Rabbi Small is now retired and has partially moved out of Barnard's Crossing, a Boston Back-bay suburb, where he has solved cases in ten previous novels, but trouble has a way of following him. Working with the police of his former community, he helps solve a murder, and while doing so, manages to teach a college course in Judaism that educates the reader on aspects of Jewish thought and history.

Kemelman stretches a bit in this latest account of Rabbi Small's detection powers and we surely miss the many interest-

ing characters from his former synagogue who populated his previous books. Having utilized this series of novels as a useful way to introduce people to American synagogue life, I am sorry that Rabbi Small will be no more. With Harry Kemelman's death his fictional rabbi will be unable to find a part-time pulpit in his retirement and continue this kind of teaching and modeling to his congregants and many other readers.

Faye Kellerman has written eight mysteries featuring Rina Lazarus and Los Angeles policeman, Peter Decker. Rina is an orthodox Jew and in the first novel, *The Ritual Bath*, she and Peter meet when he investigates the murder of Rina's first husband at a residential *yeshiva* in the suburbs of Los Angeles. Peter eventually converts to Judaism (though the plot is much more complicated than that) and marries Rina. Peter's integration into Rina's life, her children, and her parents, make it possible for Kellerman to proffer a great deal of information about traditional Jewish beliefs and rituals. The mysteries that Kellerman writes are not as well crafted as the Jewish experiences that are portrayed. There are the usual multiple clues, the details of police procedures, and much more. What is lacking, however, is a fuller development of Rina as anything other than a foil for Peter's reflections and ruminations.

These two writers have staked out the traditional Jewish community, as developed in this genre of popular fiction. They are among the very few writers who have been able to combine an interesting story and an exploration of Jewish themes in their fiction.

Perhaps they owe their popularity to the interest of some Jews in returning to some form of Jewish tradition. How nice to have your exposure to and instruction in tradition provided by a fictionalized account of Jewish heroes. There are sev-

eral others who have tried their hand at this type of detective fiction. Notable among them are Rochelle Krich, Ronald Levitsky, David Rosenbaum, and Joseph Telushkin. Both Kemelman and Kellerman are writers who have become immensely successful and their books have made it to the bestseller lists and been translated into many languages. Other novels in this Jewish variant of detective fiction focus on the world of the assimilated or acculturated Jewish private investigator, the police detective, and the amateur sleuth.

These other Jewish heroes and heroines of detective fiction mirror in many ways the 2.5 percent of the American population that Jews comprise. They behave and are portrayed in ways similar to what we have learned about the contemporary American Jewish community. Like other Jews, the process of acculturation may have blurred distinctions between them and their gentile neighbors, but a sense of peoplehood has not been entirely suppressed. Using the nomenclature that has been disseminated by the National Jewish Population Survey, they frequently can be found in the category of "Born Jewish with No Religion (secular)." They often reflect that wide group of Jews who marry non-Jews (presently at the rate of approximately 50 percent), whose commitment to Jewish education is minimal, whose Jewish identity is often marginal and whose Jewish attachments are peripheral (Kosman, *Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Study*, p. 18).

There seems, however, to be that thin thread which binds many Jews to their ancestors and to their co-religionists—and for the protagonists in these stories that thread has not entirely disappeared. Sometimes it may appear very thin, other times it may be knotted and even quite twisted, but nonetheless, it still connects.

Often the God of their ancestors has been abandoned, but the cooking of their mothers has been remembered. Even when the cooking of their mothers has been forsaken, our protagonists have invented alternatives which can be tasted, smelled, or hinted at in these pages. Thus Falk's investigation of the powerful forces in contemporary western society that lead to secularization, within an interest in religious forms, finds its fictional counterpart here as well. The wider body of this detective literature is one more example of how we now celebrate and appreciate ethnic differences in America. As Stephen Whitfield has noted, there is increasingly the seeking of Jewish identity in many best-selling novels, in serious analyses of Yiddishkeit in non-fiction, the study of Jewish themes in movies and plays and in other cultural artifacts too numerous to mention (*American Space, Jewish Time*, Hamden, CT: Archon, 1988).

Presented in this small segment of the world of popular detective fiction is a vast array of characters, plots, subplots and circumstances that give us ourselves—contemporary American Jews. As Jews have felt increasingly secure and confident in American society, so has the type of Jewish character changed. The take-it-for-granted Jewish character is now a growing part of this genre of popular literature.

This genre owes much to the non-Jewish detectives popular in the larger arena of this fiction. Crime solvers Len Schwartz, Abe Lieberman, Harvey Blissberg, Peter Decker, Dov Taylor, and others are primarily molded and able to make it in popular literature because of the tough guy image of Spenser in Robert Parker's novels. Authors Nina Fischman, Rochelle Krich, Shelley Singer, and Julie Smith owe a greater debt to Sue Grafton's alphabet-related investigator Kinsey Millhorne and Sara Paretsky's heroine V. I. Warshavsky.

Worth noting is the rarity of Israel in almost all of American Jewish detective fiction, despite the masterful writings of the Israeli author Batya Gur—three superb novels have been translated into English, beginning with *The Literary Murder*—and the American born Robert Rosenberg who moved to Israel more than 20 years ago. The Israeli detective novels are a recent phenomenon in a country that saw its greatest threat from external, not internal crime. It will be interesting to see whether the peace process will increase the popularity of Israeli detective fiction.

These Jewish heroes typically exemplify Jewish "civil" religion. With the exception of the few affirming Jewish detectives mentioned earlier, the rest are not interested in any aspect of their Jewish religious life, any particular belief or religion. Their characters are caught up in an American way of life that is more inclusive of freedom, democracy, and individualism than it is of covenant, community, and religious responsibility.

Almost 40 years ago Leslie Fiedler wrote about the how, when and the why of the appearance of the Jewish hero in American fiction (*Midstream*, 1958). Are we finding any Jewish heroes here? Detective fiction offers us modern models who don't kid themselves that they can restore order to an ungovernable universe. These detectives are the representatives of the third generation of American Jews. Not very many of them are interested in returning to tradition (orthodox or liberal), not very many of them are interested in any demonstration of their religious or ethnic identity, but they are seeking to solve the problems that they are dealt and to resolve conflict and ambiguity. The Jewish ones agonize over this task a little bit more than the others. Perhaps we can find some hope, as Falk might, in that.

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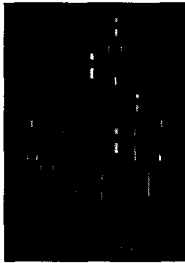
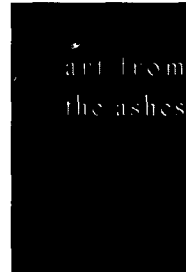
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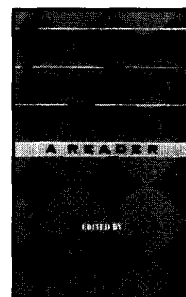
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"it is from the dominant Christian caste that the Spanish Jews of the High Middle Ages had to acquire their *romancero*" [S. G. Armistead & J. H. Silverman, "El substrato cristiano del romancero sefardí," *En torno al romancero sefardí [Hispanismo y balcanismo de la tradición judeo española]* [Madrid: Seminario Menéndez Pidal, 1982], p.145]. And this Christian substrate in songs sung by Jews means that there was constant contact between Jews and Christians for centuries, for otherwise the Sephardim could not have learned these songs and this tradition, and created new ballads within the same artistic tradition after the Expulsion. Even if we wish to discount all Inquisitorial documents, we cannot discount this living cultural evidence of what Américo Castro has called *convivencia*—a living together that makes possible cultural exchange and intermingling. Even if all the *conversos* were true Christians and ardent assimilationists (a sweeping generalization that is belied by the records of individual lives left in *responso* and Jewish communities across the world), Jews knew them and they knew Jews. And together, as Spaniards, they created and preserved an art form that is living proof of their *convivencia*.

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